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CAN THERE BE GENUINE DIALOGUE BETWEEN RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY?

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to provide clarity on some of the relations between religion and democracy, in order to address the more general issue of dialogue between the two. After a brief discussion of some of the values characteristic of democracy and religion, I consider the place of religion within the traditions that have given rise to the contemporary understanding of democracy. Next, I briefly consider to what extent democratic values and institutions exist within, or are compatible with some of the major religious traditions. This will allow the reader to see better what is involved in the issue of dialogue between religion and democracy.

Keywords: Christianity, Democracy, Dialogue, Religion, Values

1. Introduction

During the past half century, there have been important scholarly analyses of the relations between religion and democracy, but the impact of events of the past two decades — most obviously, but not only, the Al Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, the 2008 Mumbai attacks, the political activity of Christian evangelical movements in the US, the controversies over the publication of cartoons of Muhammad in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* (in 2005), the restrictions in several western European countries on wearing religious symbols or religious garb in schools (notably in 2011 and 2016), the November 2015 Paris terror shootings and suicide bombings, and

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the ongoing debates in the US concerning whether shops providing services to the public can refuse to serve clients whose lifestyles offend the religious convictions of the owners — make reflection on the issues of the compatibility of religion and democracy, and the possibility of dialogue between them, particularly timely.[1] To date, discussion of these issues has been extremely wide-ranging, as there are political and religious issues; but they are also philosophical issues.

Half a century ago, the relation of religion and democracy, and the possibility of dialogue between them, would likely not have been seen as problematic. Indeed, at least in the West, democracy seemed to make room for religion and religious voices, such as those of Martin Luther King and Beyers Naudé, and some religions seemed to reflect democratic values. It is true that, at that time, in many countries of the world, religion and religious practices were being suppressed or threatened by governments, and, in several other places, the expression of faith was being challenged by secularization and by the spread of a culture of materialism. But such events occurred most frequently from countries that were non-democratic, such as the Soviet Union.

Today, however, not only have the relations between religions and democracies come to the fore, but the loci of conflict have shifted markedly. There are still regimes around the world in which religion is restricted, but even the largest one – China – has no ongoing distinctively anti-religious animus, and the idea of it exporting "atheistic" communism today seems almost quaint. Yet, many argue that, rather than being seen as champions of freedoms such as freedom of religion and religious toleration, liberal democracy and capitalism threaten both. Many religious groups believe themselves menaced by changes in the public

[1]See Abdolkarim Soroush's *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; Larry Diamond, Marc F. Platter and Philip J. Costopoulos, eds., *World Religions and Democracy*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005; Graham Maddox, *Religion and the Rise of Democracy*, London: Routledge, 1996; John De Gruchy, *Christianity and Democracy*, Cambridge: CUP, 1995; Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

sphere introduced in the name of democracy. And there are those who defend democracy, and argue that certain religious views should not have a place in the public sphere and, especially, not within democratic institutions. Even where we see efforts in democracies to retain some place for religious traditions and practices – for example, in allowing religiously-based tribunals to address a number of civil matters among adherents[2] – the general tendency seems to be to relegate religion to a 'private sphere.'

So one might well ask what place there is, if any, for religion in a world that is increasingly characterized by democracy. One might also ask whether democracy can or must have a place within religious traditions and cultures. Can there be dialogue between religion and democracy? Or is the best that one can hope for simply a mutual toleration, and a measure of coexistence?

To answer such questions is an enormous task; there is much empirical data that bear on the issue but, more importantly, there is a significant analytical and conceptual task that needs to be done. This paper provides some (conceptual) clarity on some of the questions involved, and outlines some of the possible relations between religion and democracy. In doing so, the reader will have, at least, a start on the issue of dialogue between religion and democracy, and the options that are open to us.

I begin by considering, first, some of the key values characteristic of the modern notion of democracy and religion. Second, I look at what the place of religion has been within the texts and traditions that have given rise to our contemporary understanding of democracy. (In other words, what is the place of religion within democracy and within democracies?) Third, I look at some of the dominant religious traditions, and see to what extent democratic values and institutions exist within, or are compatible with these traditions – for, can religion be in dialogue with democracy and democratic institutions if it is, itself, not compatible with democracy? Such a survey should enable one to understand better some of the relations between religion and

[2]Shari'ah law-based tribunals to adjudicate civil matters among Muslims were supported, but, at the last moment, withdrawn by the government of the Province of Ontario in Canada, in September 2005.

democracy. It should also tell us more about the place of religion within the public sphere. And, finally, this survey will permit us to understand better the possibility of dialogue and exchange between religion and democracy.

2. Conceptual Clarifications: Democracy

Democracy, as it is generally understood and practiced today, is largely a product of what we call the West. Defining democracy is, however, a challenge. By its Greek etymology, democracy is "the common people – the *demoi* – ruling." Because we have the notion of rule here, there is a structure and an organisation implied; it is not anarchy. Of course, there are many democratic traditions, and there are many different forms of government that have been deemed to be compatible with democracy; we have, for example, constitutional monarchies, unicameral and bicameral parliamentary systems, republics, representative and direct democracies, and the like. Still, a working definition of the term 'democracy' may be: "the sovereignty of the people in general."[3]

While it is true that no specific form of government is entailed by democracy, nevertheless, it is clear that democracy brings with it a number of values. These values include equality, freedom, the respect of human dignity, involvement in one's government and the accountability of government, the presence of public deliberation or reason, the rule of law, tolerance or civility towards minorities, and more. Let me briefly explain.

Specifically, when one speaks about equality, one usually means equality of all (or at least of all citizens) before the law and equal respect. Democracy's commitment to freedom includes: life, liberty, security of the person, and freedoms of conscience, speech and association – all freedoms that we associate with the rights articulated in such documents as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. But implicit in, and perhaps fundamental to, all these freedoms and rights is *the value of determining one's own good in one's own way.* Democracy claims to respect human dignity – the intrinsic value of human beings as human beings –

[3]Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

which is taken by many[4] to underlie their rights and freedoms. Democracy requires that all be subject to the law, and that no one is above the law – this is the principle of the rule of law, beyond a rule by decree, which entails usually a system of checks and balances on the exercise of political power. Democracy incarnates the view that the will of citizens (individually or collectively) be represented, directly or indirectly, in government, and that government be accountable to them, which includes: that the activities of the government are in the interest of the people; that the government is answerable or responsible to the people; that there is a procedure to change government. Democracy generally includes the value of public deliberation on major issues. Where there is disagreement, all must be ready to be tolerant and civil and to compromise; violence and oppression are not to be exacted on minorities or opponents. When one refers to 'democracy,' then, these are some of the principles, features, and institutions that one commonly has in mind.

3. Conceptual Clarifications: Religion

Religion is similarly difficult to define. Its etymology is contested, but a suitable sense (given our contemporary understanding of the term) is that it derives from the Latin verb *religare* – to connect or to bind, and so it deals with those practices that connect and cement the relations among the human, nature, and the divine, particularly concerning those matters of purpose and the meaning of life. Still, what specifically counts as a religion is far from clear. There are, it has been reported, some 10,000 religions worldwide, and some sociologists have claimed two new religions are added every day. (Not surprisingly, in most democracies there is a clear reluctance of the law to provide a definition of religion.[5])

[4]Though not all. See Richard Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality," in *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures*, ed. S. Shute and S. Hurley, New York: Basic Books, 1993.

[5]See, for example, Paul Groarke, "Law and Freedom of Religion," in *Freedom of Religion*, ed. W. Sweet, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2010.

Religions see themselves as sources, or intermediaries, of truth (in a broad sense). In some cases, religions profess propositional truths – that is, they make assertions that claim to describe something about what is real and how reality operates. In other cases, religions may understand 'truth' in the sense of what is of "ultimate concern." In this sense, religion is a "way of meaning"; it proposes a way of life and also says something about how the world *should* be. Religions also tend to express a number of specific values – about the transcendent or the divine as a principle of value; about what should be sought or pursued in life; about the nature and value of human beings as individuals and in their own right, but also in relation to one another; and about nature or the non-human (material) world.

Religion emphasizes the importance of the commitment of the believer. Indeed, the very act of holding the religion – faith – is itself a value. Yet it is also generally a communal or collective practice, and so there is also the value of the community with shared beliefs and practices. Religion is also authoritative, at least in the believer's own life; it is often rooted in an experience that is authoritative, and is usually not based on reasons or evidence. It also serves as an overriding principle that requires obedience and the performance of duties. A further feature of religion is the insistence of the right, and even the obligation, of the believer to profess it. In this way, there is a claim to certain freedoms, based on the authority of the religion over the adherent.

Finally, for present purposes, we can say that religion is part of the adherent's *identity* – both in one's self description of who one is, and epistemologically, in being (part of) one's world view. In this latter sense, it determines how one sees the world, orders or organizes one's life, and orients oneself in the world and beyond.

When one refers to 'religion,' then, these are some of the features and values that are generally associated with it.

4. Religion and Democracy: Conceptual Relations

Given the preceding analysis of the concepts of religion and democracy, and of the values characteristic of them, one can see how some have been led to claim that there is a tension, if not an

outright conflict, between them – and that genuine dialogue and mutual engagement, as such, are not possible.

To begin with, many religions seem profoundly non-egalitarian, hierarchical and unaccountable, which would offend democratic egalitarianism. Moreover, the emphases on authority and on truth in religion seem inconsistent with the openness, the willingness to compromise, and the toleration of difference, characteristic of democracy. Frequently, the rights and doctrines and practices of religion seem to be inconsistent with public reason – that they are irrational or at least unprovable. Finally, many religions seem to preclude from serious participation in the public sphere, or at least encourage passivity and resignation. This estrangement from 'the world' has led many to welcome the move to place religion in 'private'.

Conversely, some key democratic values seem to be in tension or direct conflict with religious values. For democracy emphasizes individuals determining their own good (versus it being determined by the divine or religious authorities or prophets), the importance of public deliberation (versus divine decree), the importance of compromise (versus absolutist conceptions of good and evil), of equality and freedom (versus hierarchical authority and unequal rights based on sex or religion or caste), and so on.

Nevertheless, many defenders of democracy and democratic values have been religious people, and have claimed that their advocacy of democracy is required by their religious beliefs. And, historically, accounts of human rights and respect for dignity have been rooted in religious traditions.[6]

Thus, to understand better this putative conflict or, alternately, congeniality of religious and democratic traditions, and the prospect of dialogue between them, at least two principal lines of investigation should be pursued: first, to look at the history of democracy and at the role of religion in relation to it, and second, to look at some of the major religions today, and see whether there is a place within them for democracy and democratic values.

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[6]See my "Whose Dignity is it Anyway?" Lecture presented at the 'Breakfast on the Hill', Parliament Hill, Ottawa, Canada, May 2007.

Obviously, such an investigation cannot be carried out in detail in the present paper. Nevertheless, some general comments on both lines of investigation are possible and will, I hope, provide some insight into the tensions and conflicts that may exist, but also into whether such tensions and conflicts may be overcome, and whether dialogue might have a role in this.

5. Religion and Democracy: Tension, Conflict, and Dialogue

Consider, first, the question of the place of religion in relation to, or within, the public sphere and, particularly, in relation to democracy. This is not an easy question. This requires not looking so much at religion within democracies today, as seeing whether and, if so, how religion and democracy have coexisted, starting with the historical roots of democracy.

The roots of democracy, at least in the West, go back to the Greeks – but there democracy is regarded in a negative way. In Aristotle's *Politics*, for example, democracy is rejected "for identifying *eleutheria* [liberty] with unrestricted *exousia* [the ability to do whatever one wants], which makes freedom degenerate into license, and the polis into an anarchic condition."[7] Instead, Aristotle is generally understood to prefer the polity – a kind of 'mixed' regime where rule involves the people but in accord with the virtuous.[8] There is no evidence of tensions between religion and politics here, nor does there seem to be in any major classical author, until Christianity arrives.

In *The City of God*, Augustine (354-430) speaks of two allegiances – to the City of God and the Earthly City. His ideal is not to keep them separate, but to unify them – to develop "a political *askesis*… of humility" which will "make divine revelation central to reason."[9] Nevertheless, realizing that this is far from likely, Augustine seems to opt for a limited government that

[7]Fred D. Miller Jr., "Aristotle and the Origins of Natural Rights," *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 49 (1996); cf. *Politics*, Bk 6, Ch. 2.

[8]Polity is a kind of "mixed" constitution, involving the rule of a group of citizens between the rich and poor. See *Politics* Bk 4, Ch. 11.

[9]Chad C. Pecknold, "Augustine's Readable City: Beyond the Politics of Empire," *The Journal of Scriptural Reading*, 6 (2006).

respects liberty. But there is more to Augustine's position than this. As Jean Bethke Elshtain points out in *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*,[10] if we look at Augustine's account of language, we see how he "placed the 'speaking subject' at the centre of his political and religious probing and turned up fresh insights into the relationship between public and private, freedom and necessity, politics and the family."[11] We have a focus, then, on the value of the individual, and the possibility of a private sphere.

Thomas Aquinas presents democracy (as "government of the people"), as one of the bad forms of government – though, for Aquinas, it is to be preferred to all other bad forms of government.[12] Democracy is associated with the value of freedom, but this is not a bad thing. While it would be not only an anachronism, but a far too generous view to see Aquinas as defending democracy and democratic values as such, it is worth noting that Aquinas seems to have recognized that there can be different – moderate and just – forms of democracy.

As one moves into the late medieval and early modern periods in the West, democracy by itself is still not viewed positively – but a number of values which have come to be identified as democratic values are recognized. And these values can be seen as not only compatible with religion, but as required by religion, and as paving the way for the legitimacy of democracy and democratic institutions.

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[10]See Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996.

[11]Jean Bethke Elshtain, "The Politics of Hope: an interview with Jean Bethke Elshtain," *The Civic Arts Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Summer-Fall 1997).

[12]See Aquinas's *Commentary on the Politics*, in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, tr. Ernest L. Fortin and Peter D. O'Neill, eds. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963, and Aquinas, *On the Governance of Rulers* (*De regimine principum*), tr. Gerald B. Phelan, Toronto: St. Michael's College, 1935. My comments here summarize Christopher Gray, "Democracy in Thomas Aquinas," in *Before and After Democracy: Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*, ed. William Sweet, Leuven: Peeters, 2018.

Take the example of Jean Calvin (1509-1564).[13] Calvin was not a proponent of democracy. Nevertheless, Calvin argues that Christian life requires freedom even at the expense of earthly authority. This does not mean that people can or ought to ignore temporal authority, since the political order has an important role – namely, the preservation of humanity. But Calvin's account of religion includes a theory of resistance to unjust political authority – a theory that was one of the seeds of later theories of political resistance.

Another of the central figures of the modern period is John Locke (1632-1704).[14] What is particularly interesting about Locke is that, while he is one of the key philosophers in articulating and defending democracy, his work was profoundly shaped by his theological interests; most of the books in his personal library, for example, were theological books. Some scholars, such as Kim Parker, have argued that there is a religious underpinning throughout Locke's political ideas.[15] For Locke, Parker argues, democracy is a necessary means to self-preservation – and self-preservation is not only natural but divinely ordained. Moreover, for Locke, all human beings are equal, and this is because, Parker argues, they are created and are the property of the creator. All, therefore, have the rights necessary to survival, preservation, and "to be fruitful and multiply." Further, it is not just Locke's

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[13]For Calvin's political philosophy see, for example, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960, Vol 2, 20.9. This is discussed in W. Stanford Reid, "John Calvin: One of the Fathers of Modern Democracy," *Christian History*, Vol. 12 (1986). In what follows, I present a brief sketch of the argument of Gerald Wilson, "John Calvin on the Formation of Political Conscience," in *Before and After Democracy*, ed. Sweet.

[14]See, for example, John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1689).

[15]For a discussion of the role played by Locke's understanding of theology in politics, see Kim Parker, *The Biblical Politics of John Locke*, Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004 and "Unalienable Rights, the Creator, and the Genesis of John Locke's Liberalism," in *Before and After Democracy*, ed. Sweet.

epistemological views, but his religious views that underlie his defence of toleration. Because of the limits of (reliable) human knowledge concerning the will of the creator, we are enjoined to toleration.[16]

In the early modern period, then, we find that there is less and less of a contradiction between democracy and religious tradition – and, indeed, that the latter inform the former. Democratic values such as equality, freedom, and toleration are theologically justified, if not required.

By the time of the European Enlightenment, however, many philosophers were also attempting to distinguish between the spheres of religion and politics, and, in the process, to marginalize the importance of religion. Still, in Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), we find that religion continues to play an important role in ethics and politics.[17] Kant was interested in bringing genuine religion into coherence with genuine morality. According to Joe Knippenberg, for example, Kant holds that each of us, as rational beings, sees that we have a duty to produce the highest good.[18] This is the ground of our autonomy and our dignity. But the requirements of morality and the fact of our finitude need to be harmonious; in concrete terms, we have to find a way of reconciling the fact that we are imperfect beings with the fact that we are called to a perfect destiny. Consequently, according to Knippenberg, Kant argues that there must be a God who can establish and maintain an ethical community (as a support to human effort), who can

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[16]For work by Locke bearing on the issue of toleration, see his *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689); *A Second Letter Concerning Toleration* (1690); *A Third Letter for Toleration* (1692). For Locke, however, those who do not accept toleration – e.g., Catholics – need not be tolerated.

[17]For some recent discussions of Kant's understanding of religion and the role of politics, see Marcello Pera, "Kant on Politics, Religion, and Secularism," in *Universal Rights in a World of Diversity. The Case of Religious Freedom*, *Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Acta* 17 (2012) <www.pass.va/content/dam/scienzesociali/pdf/acta17/acta17pera.pdf> (6 March 2017).

[18]In what follows, I draw on Joe Knippenberg, "Liberalism and Religion: The Case of Kant," in *Before and After Democracy*, ed. Sweet.

strengthen human resolve to pursue perfection, and who can give human beings hope in action. Human dignity and the value of freedom – such as the value of the freedom to pursue the truth – are not just liberal democratic values; for Kant, they are connected to religion. In short, according to Knippenberg, for Kant, democratic principles have their support, if not their root, in religion.

In Hegel, we find a more complicated approach to the relation of religion and democracy.[19] Right, freedom, and equal citizenship come to exist in the world through persons thinking about the world and acting on it (e.g., using their labour and using property), as well as through engaging in a process of reciprocal recognition. As Joseph Masciulli points out, however, Hegel's account here is a product of Christianity.[20] Thus, modern political theories – theories that are liberal, secular, and democratic – in fact presuppose 'comprehensive doctrines,' such as the Christian religion.

Yet this freedom, equality, and right also require, according to Hegel, civil society and, ultimately, the state; the state, for Hegel, is "the actualization of freedom."[21] Thus, Masciulli holds, while the state that Hegel describes in *The Philosophy of Right* is not a participatory democracy, it is one in which one finds political representation, liberal toleration of religions (except for the most fanatical of religions), and a measure of freedom of speech. The phenomenon of reciprocal recognition also supports cultural and religious diversity. But the role of religion within the state goes further still; the state also depends on 'authentic' religion. To say this is not just to repeat the fact that the modern state historically

[19]Hegel's views are most extensively detailed in *The Philosophy of Right*, tr. T. M. Knox, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942. But note, also, his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837). A recent discussion is Karla M. O'Regan and Joseph Masciulli, "Hegel's Hierarchical Political-Ethical Communitarianism," in *Before and After Democracy*, ed. Sweet.

[20]Here, Hegel has in mind the Wars of Religion in France (1562-1598) and the Thirty Years War in the German states (1618-1648).

[21]G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, in *Hegel: Selections*, ed. Jacob Loewenberg, New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1929, 388-89.

has a 'religious' ground; rather, religion continues to be at its root, even in Hegel's model.[22] Thus, religious people can – and should – embrace liberal democratic values.[23]

By the time that we reach the twentieth century, then, there seem to be three broad approaches to the relation of religion and democracy and the possibility of dialogue between them.

One position is that there can be no direct dialogue – no exchange between equal partners. This view is reflected, arguably, in the work of John Rawls.[24] Rawls acknowledges that the modern democratic state arises out of Reformation Christianity, but holds that, today, it is no longer dependent on such a comprehensive doctrine.[25] Indeed, it *ought not* to be. Comprehensive doctrines, Rawls argues, restrict legitimate pluralism, freedom, and equality. It is for this reason that Rawls feels the need to articulate a non-comprehensive, secular, political conception of justice that is independent of religion, and that reflects a model of public reason.[26] Nevertheless, with this political conception, religion can have a place in democracy so far as its conceptions of the good are not unreasonable and that its exponents avail themselves of public reason in public discourse. Still, Rawls holds that we must limit the presence of comprehensive doctrines in the public sphere, and that any dialogue between religion and democracy must take place on and in the terms of democracy – and so not

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[22]Consider Hegel's statement that: "Freedom can exist only where individuality is recognized as having its positive and real existence in the Divine Being. ... On this account it is that the State rests on Religion ... obedience to King and Law so naturally follows in the train of reverence for God. ... The form of Religion, therefore, decides that of the State and its constitution." Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 404-405.

[23]See Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, sect 279, addition.

[24]See Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971; also *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

[25]See here, John Rawls and Bernard G. Prusak, "Politics, Religion & the Public Good: An interview with Philosopher John Rawls," *Commonweal*, 9/25/1998.

[26]Here, I reiterate elements of David Peddle's "Religion, Philosophy and Public Reason in Rawls," in *Before and After Democracy*, ed. Sweet.

between equal parties. Indeed, there is no dialogue with religion as such. For Rawls, however, the values of a secular liberal democratic state are such that both the religious and the non-religious should be able to support it.

A second position on the relation of religion and democracy is that, not only is there no dialogue between religion and democracy, but there is a fundamental antipathy between the two, so that even Rawls' view is, arguably, too generous. In his *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy*, Robert Kraynak argues that religion and (liberal) democracy are not compatible and, specifically, that Christian doctrine and ecclesiastical institutions are weakened to the extent that they embrace liberal democratic values. Kraynak argues that a major shift in thinking about the person occurs with Kant where, he claims, we have a new understanding of the human person as the *imago dei* – i.e., one that focuses on "the rights and dignity of the self-defining person;"[27] Kraynak holds that such a view is too narrow. He continues by saying that anyone committed to religion – particularly Catholic Christianity – needs to restrain these Kantian elements in our understanding of democracy.

Yet some see the contemporary situation as one where mutuality and dialogue are possible. This is the position of the French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882-1973). Maritain holds that there is a single natural law governing all human beings, and that the 'end' of humanity is to be free – though, by 'freedom,' Maritain does not mean license or pure rational autonomy, but the realisation of the human person in accord with his or her nature, specifically, the achievement of moral and spiritual perfection. Human beings are 'individuals' – material beings who are related to a common, social order of which they are parts. But they are also persons and, hence, have a relation to a spiritual order. The person is, thus, a 'whole', an object of dignity, "must be treated as an end,"[28] and has a

[27]Robert P. Kraynak, *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001, 159.

[28]Maritain, *Les droits de l'homme et la loi naturelle*, New York: Editions de la Maison Française, 1942, 84.

transcendent destiny. For Maritain, then, the best political order is one which recognizes the responsibilities of human beings to the communities in which they live, but also sovereignty of God.

Since Maritain held that natural law theory entailed human rights that are fundamental and inalienable, antecedent in nature, and superior to society, he favoured a democratic and liberal view of the state, and argued for a political society that is pluralistic.[29] Since both religion and the state have, as their end, the good of the human person, not only can there be dialogue between religion and democracy, but active cooperation, particularly in recognizing each person's spiritual worth and in providing the means to foster one's growth as a person.

The preceding brief survey suggests that, while the relation of religion and democracy have not always been congenial, democracy and democratic values were, directly or indirectly, the consequence of religious or religiously-informed views; there is no contradiction in a democracy having not only freedom of religion but an established religion; religion can be and has been a support for democratic institutions; and dialogue between democracy and religion is not only possible, but has occurred and has been fruitful.

This is not, however, to suggest that the two are entirely compatible, for while religious values may well have given rise to democratic values and institutions, religious institutions have resisted democracy and certain democratic values. (Nineteenth-century examples of this are the resistance to human rights and liberalism found in ultramontanism and the views of the Pope Pius IX.[30]) Thus, one must admit that some democratic values have come about in reaction to religion. Moreover, some religious practices have been limited within democracies (and even implicitly within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), obviously because of a conflict in values. This issue of limitation is

[29]Maritain, *Man and the State*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, 127.

[30]I discuss this 'history' in "Freedom of Religion: From Toleration to Human Right," in *Freedom of Religion*, ed. W. Sweet. Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2010.

a serious one, but it is also revealing for understanding the possibility of dialogue between democracy and religion.

What we can discern so far is, then, that not only do some religions and religious values support democratic values, and some religious values are among democratic values, but there are clearly tensions. In any event, this is only part of the issue of whether there can be dialogue between religion and democracy. What needs also to be considered is whether democracy and democratic values have a place in religion.

6. Religion within Democracies

The second question noted at the beginning of section 3 concerns the place of democracy and democratic values in relation to – or within – religion. It would be a simple task to show that there has been, and that there is, opposition to various democratic values and structures from different religious traditions. But it would be much more fruitful to consider whether this is primarily an anthropological, sociological, or historical claim, and whether such opposition is in fact necessary. Is there any evidence that democracy and democratic values have a place, at least within the major religious traditions? If there is, we clearly have a basis for dialogue between religion and democracy.

The question of whether Islam is compatible with democracy – specifically, with the values of freedom, equality, and public participation in government – has been discussed since at least the late 19th century;[31] there have been three broad responses.[32] As Forough Jahanbakhsh points out, the first is that of incompatibilism – held, interestingly, by both fundamentalists and secularists – that Islam preaches that sovereignty belongs to God alone (and so a pure human sovereignty would be a disorder and disordered); that equality of religions and of the sexes is

[31]See Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam*, trans. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

[32]See, for example, Forough Jahanbakhsh, "Islam and Democracy: A New Paradigm of Compatibility Drawing upon Abdolkarim Soroush's Views," in *Before and After Democracy*, ed. Sweet.

inconsistent with order and *shari'ah* [law]); and that democracy has led to moral practices inconsistent with Islam. The second response is that of 'compatibilists' who (claim to) find comparable concepts in Islam and democratic views. But a third approach, according to Jahanbakhsh, is that of Abdolkarim Soroush – that, if we see religion as having a more fluid nature in which religiosity and religious practice take place, and if we differentiate between religion and religious understanding, a coexistence of democracy and religious understanding that recognizes freedom of faith is possible.

Another challenging case is that of Hinduism.[33] Some scholars, such as Harold Coward, argue that, if we look at Hindu *dharma*, we find three principles that seem strongly inconsistent with liberal democratic views: an assumption of inequality (for, despite the claim that there is equality in the goal and the end of life, i.e., the attainment of *moksa*, the existence of caste reveals that not all are born equal); an emphasis on cosmic order over individuality; and a denial of rights and freedoms as universal (e.g., because of the differences of caste, and because of the responsibilities of the different stages of life of the believer). From the early nineteenth century, Coward notes, figures such as Ram Mohan Roy have attempted to find ways of explaining or accommodating caste within a model of liberal democracy – but also to find ways of revising religious practice within Hinduism so that caste is modified or rejected. This effort at promoting democratic values continued thereafter, so that, by the mid twentieth century, a policy of secularism was established within the *Constitution of the*

[33]For divergent views on this issue, see, for example, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar famously argued that "if Hindu Raj does become a fact, it will, no doubt, be the greatest calamity for this country. No matter what Hindus say, Hinduism is a menace to liberty, equality and fraternity. On that account it is incompatible with democracy." See *Sources of Indian Traditions: Modern India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh*, 3rd ed., Rachel Fell McDermott, et alii, eds., New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, 532. This issue is discussed by Harold Coward, in "Hinduism, Human Rights and the Hindu Nationalist Movement," in *Before and After Democracy*, ed. W. Sweet.

State of India. In recent years, this balance has been threatened by Hindu nationalists unhappy with the constitutional solution of state secularism, and who insist that "patriotic" Indians must be Hindus (or, at least, members of one of the Indic religions). Coward points out, however, that the fact that this balance has been maintained for over a half century suggests that a mutual accommodation of religion and democracy is sustainable. Thus, if there can be compatibility between Hinduism and democracy, there is evidence of the possibility of dialogue between them.

Buddhism is another tradition in which democratic principles of freedom and equality may seem to be inconsistent with religious belief. Some have, for example, argued that there is no room for human rights in Buddhism[34] – partly because of some of the presuppositions of that religious tradition about the nature of the self and about Buddhism's advocacy of detachment. For example, many accounts of human rights and human dignity presuppose the existence of a stable human nature, whereas in Buddhism there is a deep suspicion of claims that human beings – or, indeed, anything – have an essence. Related notions, such as the 'universal dignity' of human beings as distinct from the rest of nature, do not, moreover, seem to have much of a place either. Further, there is no word in Sanskrit or Pali for (subjective) right, and the term 'human dignity' is alien to Buddhist scripture.[35] Nevertheless, some contemporary Buddhists[36] would argue that, in Theravada Buddhism, for example, we find such principles as a belief in the equality of the human race, and that there are texts in the *Tipitaka* (the Pali texts which contain the basic doctrines of

[34]Perry Schmidt-Leukel, "Buddhism and the Idea of Human Rights: Resonances and Dissonances," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol. 26, (2006): 33-49.

[35]Damien Keown, "Are there "Human Rights" in Buddhism?," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Vol. 2 (1995): 3-27, 2.

[36]For a positive view, see Lhamo Dondrub [XIV Dalai Lama], "Buddhism, Asian Values, and Democracy," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1999). For a cautious view, see Mettanando Bhikkhu, "Buddhism and Democracy: A Theravada Buddhist Approach," in *Before and After Democracy*, ed. W. Sweet.

Theravada Buddhism) that provide an account of social and personal ethics. Buddhist scholars also point to the robust defence of human rights by the current Dalai Lama. One can find, then, democratic values within Buddhism.

Confucianism can be seen to exhibit a similar ambiguity. Some have argued that, traditionally, Confucianism does not recognize the dignity of all persons, is hierarchical, and acknowledges the supreme power of an emperor. Still, there has been an engagement of Confucianism[37] with democracy from the late nineteenth century, and particularly after the so-called May 4th (1919) movement. At that time, there was an effort to introduce "Mr Science' but also 'Mr Democracy' into China. Here, 'democracy' was to reflect principles such as the respect for the individual as the bearer of rights, the insistence that individuals relate to one another in society through rational structures and institutions, and that social institutions must be answerable to individuals and must employ rational discourse rather than violence. The contemporary Confucian scholar, Vincent Shen, for example, has argued that not only can Confucianism defend such principles, but it can contribute to their development in a way that provides a stronger basis for modern democracy. The Confucian notion of *ren* (humaneness or humanity), for example, reflects a conception of the respect of the individual that is not reducible to that of individualism. And while Confucianism has not obviously recognized a minimum value of all persons, there is no reason why it cannot. Further, the notion of *ren* could be used to construct an ideal of moral democracy with a truly human end that could be, in turn, a condition for political democracy. Shen also claims that the Confucian notion of *shu* (a willingness to go to 'the other' in a sympathetic way) is not only consistent with, but may supplement democratic notions of communicative rationality

[37]Vincent Shen, *Generosity to the Other: Chinese Culture, Christianity and Strangification* [in Chinese], Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2004. Here, I summarize Shen's arguments in "Confucianism, Democracy and Modernity," in *Before and After Democracy*, ed. Sweet.

(defended by, for example, Jürgen Habermas[38]). This leads to what Shen calls the notion of strangification, which provides a condition for cross-cultural dialogue, and serves as a basis for a robust notion of democratic exchange.

Even though Christianity has had an uneven relation to democracy and democratic institutions, as we have seen above, it has nevertheless had a formative role in the development of democracy. In many cases, it is not merely that Christians have been active in the process of democratizing, but that they have seen this activity as their duty. But some may object that the historical compatibility of Christianity and democracy occurred in conditions where the religious pluralism of contemporary democracies would have been unanticipated, and where the current critique of democracy from the perspective of some religious movements would have been quite unfamiliar. In a number of papers, Jonathan Chaplin has argued, for example, that if we understand democracy as holding at least the principle that there must be a popular election or selection of rulers, there are at least three distinct ways in which Christian traditions have consistently allowed for and, indeed, justified democracy.[39] First, there have been consent theories, where – while ultimate authority is divine – the actual selection, authorization, or confirmation of rulers was a right of the people. Second, there have been justifications rooted in a Christian view of human beings as having a potential for self-development and the exercise of responsible freedom. (That is, since they are equal in dignity and respect, there should be a universal franchise in the choice of leaders.) Finally, Chaplin argues, some have seen democracy

[38]See, for example, Habermas's *The Theory of Communicative Action*, *Vol. 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. T. McCarthy, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1984.

[39]Here, I summarize Jonathan Chaplin's argument in "Christian Theories of Democracy: The Contemporary Relevance of a Neglected Legacy," in *Before and After Democracy*, ed. Sweet. See also "How Much Cultural and Religious Pluralism Can Liberalism Tolerate?" in *Liberalism, Multiculturalism and Toleration*, ed. J. Horton, London: Macmillan, 1993, 32-49.

justified more as a defensive measure and a check on office holders. Chaplin concludes that while there have been criticisms of each of these views, if they can be combined to ensure that there is an egalitarianism, a breadth of participation in the process, and a clear view of the source of political authority, we will have a stronger account of democracy that is not only consistent with, but called for by Christianity.

What has been consistently pointed out in the preceding illustrations is the need to see and, perhaps, to think of religion and democracy in terms of their values and not primarily their institutions. Leslie Armour, for example, has argued that religion and democracy are both communicative practices, and that communication by its very nature leads to development.[40] Thus, while the development and evolution of communicative practices may lead to disagreement, this is not obviously a bad thing. For if we see our understanding of political systems as a product of a communicative practice, then our understanding of the divine or the transcendent can be as well – and communities can work to bring out the transcendent more clearly. What this means is that religion and democracies must both be 'open' – for example, that religious beliefs, like political beliefs, are never absolute and fixed, but are subject to deepened understanding and change. Thus, there is – and, indeed, there must be – dialogue between religion and politics, for what they express bears on each other; religious propositions bear on non-religious ones, and vice versa.

7. Conclusion

What can we conclude about the possibility of dialogue between religion and democracy? In this paper, I have sought simply to provide some conceptual clarifications, and to outline some of the relations between religion and democracy that speak to the possibility of mutually beneficial communication and exchange.

At the level of democratic politics and institutional religion today, there is no doubt that religion and democracy frequently conflict, and that there is a move in many places to render any

[40]See, for example, Leslie Armour, "Religion and Democracy," in *Before and After Democracy*, ed. Sweet.

possible dialogue moot by excluding religion from the public sphere. Insistence on public reason and the rejection of religious authority suggest to some that there is an inconsistency between religion and democracy, and that there is no common ground on which dialogue can take place.

Yet there has been resistance to this, for religion (understood in the broad sense of that which is of 'ultimate concern') is part of contemporary cultures and, whether one likes it or not, cannot be ignored.

Given the history of the rise of democracy and the role of religion, and given the place of religion within modern democracies, I have suggested that there is at least a prima facie case that can be made to show that religion and democracy not only can engage in fruitful dialogue, but can work together. Religion was, historically, largely at the root of democracy; those promoting and defending democratization often did so coming from a religious tradition; and democratic values include – and must include – certain religious values (e.g., of conscience, association, and more). Moreover, we increasingly find within religions an openness towards – if not a necessity of recognizing – democratic values. This reiterates the fact that there must be some kind of commensurability between them. Thus, religion cannot be excluded from discussion, though the terms of this discussion are still open for debate.

Finally, to see how there can be dialogue between religion and democracy, we must recall that neither religion nor democracy can be 'closed' – just as a culture cannot be closed. For just as a culture must be open to new experience, and grows as it is able to draw on tradition in making sense of that experience, so religion and democracy must do likewise. For this to occur, then, efforts need to be made to seek genuine dialogue between religion and democracy.