

From Secularism to Post-Secularism: Jurgen Habermas on Religion in a Secular State

Christian Bryan S. Bustamante, Ph.D.
San Beda College

The recent debate on the Reproductive Health Law that almost divided the Filipino nation would lead one to think about the relationship between the Catholic Church and the State. The passage of Reproductive Health Law in a society dominated by Catholics, and the only Catholic country in Asia, was a surprise to some observers. For some, it is a sign of dwindling influence of the Catholic Church among its faithful and to government institutions. While others would look at it as a result of political maneuvering since it has the support of the current administration, and they have the numbers in the Houses of Congress. On the other hand, some would read it as a “sign” that secularism is creeping in the Philippine society and slowly influencing the ideas of Filipinos. The third observation is interesting since it signifies an emerging mindset or worldview among the Filipinos. It sees the passage of the controversial law as a result of a paradigm shift on the Filipinos, and not purely in terms of relationship between the Church and State or in terms of political maneuvering.

This article plows into the basic ideas of secularism, for us to understand its meaning and tenets as well as its history. In understanding secularism, we will also be enlightened as to the relationship between the Church and State particularly when it comes to debates on government programs and policies. Aside from looking into the basic ideas of secularism, this article also discusses Habermas’s notion of post-secularism. Habermas’s post-secularism is a critique of secularism, but it does not abolish secularism. He proposes an inclusive liberal framework on the relationship between religion and the secular state. His proposal is influenced by John Rawls’s proviso.

The Meanings and History Secularism

According to Alessandro Ferrara, secularism has three meanings. The first is what he calls as political secularism that

espouses the principles of religious neutrality and separation of church and state.¹ It is the solution to end religious wars and the appropriate answer to the challenges of religious pluralism.² Religion is not considered irrelevant in the society and the state; however, it puts a demarcation line as far as religious influence is concerned. It declares that such influence should not cross the line that divides church and state. It segregates religion as private and personal and treats all faiths as equal. The second meaning sees secularism as social phenomena. Social secularism sees that the importance of religion in social life is gradually waning.³ Religion ceases influencing law, politics, education and public life; and the use of religious rituals and symbols gradually becomes irrelevant and meaningless.⁴ Individuals no longer understand their political and social relationships in the religious lens alone and find new language in articulating such relationship. That language may be sociological or psychological or legal, but definitely not only religious or theological. The third meaning of secularism sees religion as one of the options, and not the most popular option, in modern society. Religion has no significance at all in modern society and state. It is perceived as only one of the existing institutions or groups or communities that have its own set of values and truths. And as one among the many, it depends on individual members to choose it, and use its values and truths as guide in understanding life and in living meaningfully. The third meaning of secularism is close to the notion of secularist. Secularist “adopts a polemical stance towards religious doctrines” and “views religion as a retrograde position that, at least, ideally will ultimately dissolve in the acid of scientific criticism.”⁵ The third meaning of secularism is purely secular for it does not put significance on religion and religious belief in public life of individuals and in the society.

Clearly, the three meanings demonstrate that the explanation of secularism comes from the point of view of religious significance and relevance. The three meanings can be interpreted

¹Alessandro Ferrara, “The Separation of Religion and Politics in a Post-Secular Society” in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 35, nos. 1-3, 78.

²Jurgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere” in *The Holberg Prize Seminar 2005*, Holberg Prize Laureate Professor Jurgen Habermas: Religion in Public Sphere, 12.

³Ferrara, *op cit.*, 78-79.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Hugh Baxter, Habermas: The Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy (California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 202.

in a continuum process: that political secularism can lead to social secularism and eventually to secularist stance. On the other hand, it can also be interpreted as separate phenomena: the secularization of the State (political) is different to the secularization of the society (society) and of the individual (secularist). It is possible that a State is secular, for it adopts the principles of separation of church and state and religious freedom, but the society and the individuals are not, for they still find meaning in religious rituals and symbols and use it in social rituals and functions.

Hawke Brunkhorst provides philosophical perspectives in understanding secularism. Secularism can be understood and explained by two mutually exclusive readings of independency theory and dependency theory. In the former, religions and religious traditions and practices are perceived as “ideological obstacles” to the achievement and realization of a better life and a better society.⁶ Hence, the objective of secularism is emancipation from religious traditions and practices in order to achieve modernization of society. The modernization of society is equated and confused with progress and development. That is why independency theory also sees the primitiveness of religion as an obstacle to advancement. Dependency theory sees the objective of independency theory as impossible, for it sees modern society as dependent on religious heritage; and in particular, European societies are dependent on Biblical heritage and modern concepts such as freedom, democracy, solidarity, empire, sovereignty and autonomy evolved from religious meanings and truths.⁷ For dependency theory, religious truths, traditions, and practices should be seen as one of the propositions in modern society that has valid claims. It sees religion to remain in the modern society and cannot be absolutely eradicated by modern thoughts that are influenced by scientific reason and knowledge. Scientific reason and knowledge include the social sciences and the humanities that evolved in modern period because of the influence of empiricism and positivism.

In addition, Helge Hoibraaten sees the rise of modern secular thought as a “kind of assertive self-defense against the frightening

⁶Hawke Brunkhorst, “Hard Times for Democracy” in The Holberg Prize Seminar 2005, Holberg Prize Laureate Professor Jurgen Habermas: Religion in Public Sphere, 95.

⁷Ibid., 97.

thought potential to medieval theological absolutism.”⁸ It is a “human self-assertion against the theological absolutism of the late Middle Ages.”⁹ Hoibraaten cites the influence of Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant to the development of this idea. Descartes’ consciousness revolutionized man’s idea of God. Descartes created an “inner castle,” the consciousness that contains representations that are evidently true and provide us with the “foundations for the methodical control of the world.”¹⁰ Though Descartes argues that the idea of God in one’s consciousness is caused by a “formally infinite reality,”¹¹ which is God, but he/she becomes conscious of such idea when he/she becomes conscious of himself/herself as an existing and thinking being. Hence, the consciousness of God follows after being conscious of oneself as thinking and existing being. Kant, on the other hand, does not deny the existence of God; however, he explains that God’s existence cannot be proven theoretically, for it is a matter of faith.¹² Aside from that, Kant sees God as the goal of moral order; however, he does not see God as its source. It is impractical for God to be the source of moral order, for human beings will only act on fear. They will be like marionettes or mechanical puppets without dignity.¹³ Kant gives freedom paramount importance and he defines it in the context of morality.¹⁴ It is important for individuals to know and understand moral laws as well as the consequences in disobeying it. They must know their moral duties and must act based on such duties. For Kant, immoral acts, or evil, is a product of reason – a reason that rejects practical reason.¹⁵ It is an act of freedom that is against the moral order – the moral order that makes freedom possible.¹⁶ The existence of God, for Kant, is a product of practical reason. As what mentioned a while ago, God is the goal of moral order. One is behaving morally towards God. It is precisely the practical reason for God’s existence:

⁸Helge Hoibraaten, “Post-metaphysical Thought, Religion and Secular Society” in The Holberg PriSeminar 2005, Holberg Prize Laureate Professor Jurgen Habermas: Religion in Public Sphere, 51.

⁹Ibid., 54.

¹⁰Ibid.,

¹¹Lawrence Nolan and Alan Nelson, “Proofs for the Existence of God” in The Blackwell Guide to Descartes’ Meditations, ed. Stephen Gaukroger (USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 110.

¹²Hoibraaten, op cit., 56.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 56.

God's existence provides comfort for those who behave morally that in the end, those who are moral will be rewarded. Descartes and Kant's ideas influenced the development of the idea of human self-assertion against theological absolutism, because their ideas of God emanate from individual's consciousness as well as from individual's practical reason. It is no longer an idea of God that is absolutely outside and independent of one's existence. It is a God born out of the human person's consciousness and reason.

Charles Taylor criticizes the fixation on religion in explaining secularism. He recognizes the two contending paradigms in secularism, i.e., a view that involves the "principled distance" between the church and state, but does not absolutely disregard religion; and a view that espouses the ideas of society's freedom from religion and religious outlook, and no input from religion.¹⁷ Secularism is beyond these two paradigms. It is not essentially about religious freedom or religious emancipation, such are consequences of secularism. According to Taylor, secularism "has to do with the correct response of the democratic state to diversity."¹⁸ It is not between non-religious and religious or atheist and theist. The principles of separation between church and state as well as of religious freedom are outcomes of the democratic society's response to religious diversity. These principles aim is to shun political favoritism of one faith or religion over the other. The principles of religious freedom and separation of church and state, along with the principles of the freedom of the press, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, are one of the responses of modern democratic societies to political, ideological, cultural diversities. These principles recognize and resolve diversity in modern society. That is why Taylor argues that "religion should not be considered as special case;" rather, it is "simply one instance of the more general challenge of diversity."¹⁹

Taylor offers his four-principle model of secularism as a framework in understanding the secular state. The secular state (1) protects people in their belongings, practices, and worldviews;

¹⁷Charles Taylor, "Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism" in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, Judith Butler et al., eds. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan Van Antwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 34-35.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁹Judith Butler et al, *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, eds. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan Van Antwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 60.

(2) treats people equally; (3) gives all individuals and sectors a hearing; and, (4) maintains harmonious relationship and comity between members and supporters of different faiths.²⁰ Aside from this model, Taylor also emphasizes the need to understand the historical origins of secularism. Secularisms are “intellectual and ideological constructs and traditions” that have “different political histories” and “different juxtapositions to religious claims.”²¹ For Taylor, secularism has “two important founding contexts:” The first amendment in the Constitution of the United States of America and the French Revolution.²² The First Amendment states that the US Congress “shall pass no law establishing religion or impeding the free exercise thereof.” The primary concern of this provision is the state’s neutrality to all religions as well as the separation of church and state. The goal of the First Amendment was not to eradicate religion in the secular state but to “exclude all rivalry among Christian sects.”²³ On the other hand, secularism in French Revolution is a product of “struggle against a powerful church.”²⁴ Its goal was to make state independent to religion and to have its own moral basis, separate to religion. That is why Taylor recognizes the three principles of French Revolution, i.e., liberty, equality, and fraternity, as the bases of the complex requirements of secularism.

We cannot shun religion in the discussion of secularism. This is evident in Ferrara, Brunkhorst, Hoibraaten and even in Taylor’s explanation of secularism. Secularism is a stance of modern society or modern state to religion. It is a perspective and mind-set influenced by the Enlightenment and modern philosophical thought, and even by modern theology and by the Protestant Reformation, that questioned and debunked the veracity of medieval and scholastic philosophy and theology. I would like to use these words of Friedrich Nietzsche to illustrate a philosophical mind-set that sustain secularism: “But everything has become: there are no eternal facts, just as there are no absolute truths.”²⁵ He further states: “Where you see ideal things, I see what is – human,

²⁰Taylor, op cit., 35, 37.

²¹Craig Calhoun, Religion, Secularism, and Public Reason in The Holberg Prize Seminar 2005, Holberg Prize Laureate Professor Jurgen Habermas: Religion in Public Sphere. 69.

²²Taylor, op cit., 38-39.

²³Ibid., 38.

²⁴Ibid., 39.

²⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, Human, All Too Human, trans. R.J Hollingdale (USA: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13.

alas, all-too-human.”²⁶ Secularism is a mind-set that dethroned the old and is, later on, successfully translated into constitutional and legal principles and into social norms that paved the way for the birth of modern institutions. It is a mind-set that “does not evidentially depend on the existence of God, or on theological considerations, or on the pronouncement of a person on institution qua religious authority.”²⁷ Secularism develops not only a mind-set but also an attitude towards religion and religious belief. It is an attitude of negation of religion’s role in social and public lives as well as an attitude of doubt to the validity and certainty of religious truths. Secularist thinking does not see truth as transcendental and metaphysical; and, it does not also see social, political and legal practices, processes, and institutions from vantage of transcendental and metaphysical realities. It sees truth, practices, process and institutions as constructions of the human persons; hence, can be altered by them. Its truth is based on the discourses of contemporary sciences and on pragmatic solutions to human problems and miseries. It is this mind-set and attitude that divide the religious and the state. The former operates in the framework of secular mind-set and attitude that contradicts religious realities and validities.

Habermas’ Post-Secular Society

Jurgen Habermas, an agnostic and secular thinker, argues in his recent writings that religion plays an essential role in the social and political realms of the modern world. It is still present in a highly secularized state and its influence in the realm of political discourses cannot be undermined. In his lecture, *Myth and Ritual*, Habermas recognizes the essential role played by religion in the formation of the mind and concludes that religion endures throughout history.²⁸ In his conversation with Charles Taylor, he clarifies that religious influence must be given special attention, because it belongs to a “kind of family of discourse in which you do not just move within

²⁶Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 283.

²⁷Baxter, *op cit.*, 196.

²⁸Jurgen Habermas, *Myth and Ritual* (unpublished lecture at Berkeley Lecture Center on October 19, 2011).

a worldview, or within a cognitive interpretation of a domain of human life, but you are speaking out...from an experience that is tied up with your membership in a community.”²⁹ In the book, *Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, Habermas cites the functional contribution of religion to the reproduction of motivation and attitudes that are societally desirable.³⁰ He admits that there is a phase in the modernization of the public consciousness where religious and secular mentalities are assimilated.³¹ The connection of the ruling dynasties with the divine and the transformation of the religious rituals into state rituals are manifestations of the assimilation between the religious and the secular.³² To put it differently, “religion is part of the genealogy of public reason.”³³ Habermas takes note of the fact that modern and secular ideas of emancipation and liberation “developed in largely religious discourses in Europe.”³⁴ Hence, religion cannot be disengaged from public reason, for disengaging it means to “disconnect public reason from a tradition that continues to give life and content.”³⁵ In his Holberg speech entitled, *Religion in the Public Sphere*, he points out that religion plays an integral role in the life of a person with faith.³⁶ He claims that it is the source of one’s energy and it nurtures one’s entire life.³⁷

In his paper presented at the Istanbul Seminar on June 2008, he claims that we are moving towards a post-secular state.³⁸ The secular state is different to post-secular state, for the former is characterized by “a non-religious and post-metaphysical justification of the normative bases of democratic constitutional state;”³⁹ while, the latter is characterized by the presence of religious communities. In post-secular states, “religion maintains a public

²⁹Judith Butler et al, op cit., 63.

³⁰Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Jurgen Habermas, *Dialectics on Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, ed. Florian Schuller, trans. Brian McNeil, C.R.V. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 46.

³¹*Ibid.*, 46-47.

³²Jurgen Habermas, “The Political: The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology” in *The Power of Religion in Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 18.

³³Craig Calhoun, op cit., 65.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶Jurgen Habermas, *Religion in the Public Sphere*, 14.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸Jurgen Habermas, “A post-secular society – what does that mean?” (delivered at the Istanbul Seminars organized by Reset Dialogues on Civilizations in Istanbul on June 2 – 6, 2008.)

³⁹Ratzinger and Habermas, op cit., 24.

influence and relevance, while the secularistic certainty that religion will disappear worldwide in the course of modernization is losing ground.”⁴⁰ Habermas’ post-secularism is not a matter of objective reality, but of public perception and individual subjectivity.⁴¹ It is a change in consciousness that signifies a “revision of a previously overconfidently secularist outlook, rather than a return of religion to a stage on which it had once been absent.”⁴² Habermas’ post-secularism, in other words, does not provide a timeline that literally refers to the resurrection of religious dominance in social and public lives. Rather, it is a shift in public perception and opinion influenced by religions and religious or a public outlook that is religiously oriented. The implication of post-secularism is the need to adjust by the secular citizens to the “fact that religious communities persist in the midst of modernized society; more so, non-believers need to adjust to the “persistence of faith-based convictions.”⁴³ Habermas advocates for a “permanent coexistence of religious and secular convictions” and renounces the superiority of secular reason.⁴⁴ Secular reason might err while religious conviction might also be true.⁴⁵

Because of post-secularism, Habermas proposes a shift from normative to epistemological arguments and highlights the importance of learning processes as important mechanisms in a liberal political order, for without which mutual respect and cooperation from citizens of different faiths and backgrounds cannot be achieved.⁴⁶ He calls this as the new epistemic attitude. In his theory of communicative action, he gives emphasis on the role of language to arrive at universal understanding. Language is the “link between universalization,”⁴⁷ because through it unity and connection

⁴⁰Jürgen Habermas, *A post-secular society – what does that mean?*

⁴¹Volker Kaul, “Jürgen Habermas, Tariq Ramadan and Michael Walzer in a Dialogue on Politics and Religion” in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 36, nos. 3-4 (London: Sage Publications, 2010), 507.

⁴²Austin Harrington, “Habermas and the Post-secular Society” in *European Journal of Social Theory*, 10(4) (London: Sage Publications, 2007), 547.

⁴³Arne Johan Vetlesen, “Faith in Religion: Habermas’s Post-secular Search for Meaning and Solidarity” in *The Holberg Prize Seminar 2005, Holberg Prize Laureate Professor Jürgen Habermas: Religion in Public Sphere*, 22.

⁴⁴Thomas M. Schmidt, “The Discourse of Religion in the Post-Secular Society” in *The Holberg Prize Seminar 2005, Holberg Prize Laureate Professor Jürgen Habermas: Religion in Public Sphere*, 83.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶Jürgen Habermas, *Religion in the Public Sphere*, 12.

⁴⁷W. Rehg, *Insight and Solidarity: A Study in the Discourse Ethics of Jürgen Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 41.

between individuals can be achieved. The goal of communicative action is to arrive at coordination of action and consensus by invoking claims that are accepted by all as valid, or to come up with a common understanding of the situation that confront individuals.⁴⁸ It is a procedure that leads to common understanding. That is why, participants in communicative action should be “free to raise and challenge claims without fear of coercion, intimidation and deceit; and all must be given the equal chances to speak, to make assertions, self-presentations and normative claims and to challenge others.”⁴⁹ They should also establish rules and norms to secure the validity of disputed claims,⁵⁰ and such are instrument in arriving at agreement. In the context of Habermas’ communicative action, citizens of post-secular states can arrived at common understanding, cooperation, coordination and consensus if they develop the new epistemic attitude. He describes this new epistemic attitude as “acquired by learning” and a learning that arises from a “reconstruction of sacred truths that is compelling for people of faith in the light of modern living conditions for which no alternatives any longer exist.”⁵¹ This new epistemic attitude means that religious citizens should have learn how to adopt toward their secular environment;” on the other hand, secular citizens should not perceive religious traditions and religious communities as archaic relics of pre-modern societies”⁵² and irrational. In the new epistemic attitude, we have to accept the fact that there is no difference in broad cultural level of reasoning and in general cognitive level – “reason is working in religious traditions, as well as in cultural enterprise and in science; and there is only one and the same human reason.”⁵³ Religious reasons depend on cognitive beliefs and existential beliefs that are rooted in the social dimension of membership, socialization, and prescribed practices.”⁵⁴ Habermas’ new epistemic attitude is an attitude of understanding that is acquired by learning the meanings of utterances, symbols,

⁴⁸J. Donald Moon, “Practical Discourse and Communicative Ethics” in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, Stephen K. White ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 146.

⁴⁹G. Warnke, “Communicative Rationality and Cultural Values” in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, Stephen K. White ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 126.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹J. Habermas, *Religion in Public Sphere*, 17.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Judith Butler et al, *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, 61.

⁵⁴Ibid., 62.

practices, beliefs and rituals of the religious and secular worlds. In a pluralistic society, the citizens of faith and people from the secular world have a duty to recognize their differences and work toward consensus by learning and understanding such differences.

Habermas' post-secularism recognizes the secular character of state that espouses the principles of freedom of religion and separation of church and state. But he argues that the separation of church and state espoused by secular state is not yet sufficient condition to guarantee equal religious freedom,⁵⁵ because it cannot expect the citizens of faith "to split their identity in public and private components" when they participate in public debates and contribute to the formation of public opinion.⁵⁶ For Habermas, the separation of church and state should not be translated into "undue mental and psychological burden" for people of faith.⁵⁷ The secular world cannot deny the fact that religion plays an essential role in the formation of one's opinion and worldview. When citizens of faith participate in public sphere, the influence of their religious belief in their political discourses cannot be discounted. Religious communities and organizations in secular state cannot also be denied of their participation in the public sphere. It is a given reality that some people of faith who are using secular and legal language are influenced by religious reason. Their arguments and opinions also contain an element of faith. In post-secularism, the secular or the secularist and the citizens of faith co-exist harmoniously. This harmonious co-existence is a product of respect developed out of new epistemic attitude. Then and again, I would like to reiterate that one of the requisites in developing a new epistemic attitude is by accepting religion and faith as reason.

Habermas' Translation and the Relationship of Religion and the Secular State

The participation of citizens of faith in political public sphere has limitations. Habermas defines such limitation by requiring the citizens of faith to translate religious language to secular language when it is used to formulate or justify political decisions that will

⁵⁵Ibid., 13.

⁵⁶Ibid., 14.

⁵⁷Ibid.

be enforced as a law.⁵⁸ There are various reasons why translation is required when citizens of faith entered the secular political realm. The exclusivity of the religious language to its members is the first reason why it needs to be translated. The meaning of religious language is available only to those who believe – those who have the faith to see and understand the language. Its function is not only communication but also the solidarity of members. That is why Habermas stresses that religious language must be presented in a language that is accessible to all, and that language which is accessible to all is the secular language, in order “to arrive at reasons that are more general than the ones in the religious language,”⁵⁹ which is exclusivist. The neutrality of the state is the second reason for the translation. State’s neutrality allows religions to express their truths as well as to contribute to public debates.⁶⁰ But it does not allow the state to consider one religious truth as superior over the other, or to use a religious discourse as the sole basis of its decision, to regard a religious doctrine as the foundation of a particular public policy. In the principle of neutrality, religions are all equal; hence, it is the responsibility of religions to translate the language of their doctrines, for it to be understood by non-believers and believers of other faiths. Religions must accept the fact that in a democratic process, they are competing with other worldviews – religious and non-religious. And for their voices to be heard in the public arena - executive agencies, legislative bodies, courts of law, constitutional bodies - translation is required. Habermas’ translation requirement is an accommodation of religious views in democratic processes. In the words of Cristina Lafont, it meets the need of a “liberal criterion of democratic legitimacy” as well as the “need to secure the political inclusion of religious citizens that democratic legitimacy” requires.⁶¹ Translation does not only meet the requirement of democratic legitimacy, but it also demonstrates, on the part of religion and state, tolerance and respect.⁶² It is implied in the translation requirement that no religion monopolizes truth

⁵⁸Ibid., 64.

⁵⁹Ibid., 114.

⁶⁰Ratzinger and Habermas, op cit., 51.

⁶¹Cristina Lafont, “Religion and the Public Sphere: What are deliberative Obligations of Democratic Citizenship?” in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, volume 35, numbers 1-2, 131.

⁶²Arne Johan Vetlesen, “Faith in Religion: Habermas’s Post-Secular Search for Meaning and Solidarity” in *The Holberg Prize Seminar 2005, Holberg Prize Laureate Professor Jurgen Habermas: Religion in Public Sphere*, 21.

and religious views are considered equal. Hence, the state must not restrict religion's participation in democratic processes and articulation of support or disagreement on proposed or enacted policies. State's respect to religion, however, cannot only be demonstrated in allowing them to participate but also in its attitude to religion. It was mentioned in the earlier part of this paper that it is a must for the state, or the secular world, to recognize religions as rational; and such is the greatest demonstration of respect and a challenge to the state. Translation requirement, on the part of religion, is futile if there is no recognition of religious discourses and rituals as reasonable. The burden on the part of the religious is translation; while, on the part of the secular state it is acceptance of religion as reason and to rely on religious reasons in political process and decision-making.

In his book, *The Future of Human Nature*, Habermas illustrates translation of religious doctrine to secular language. On the issue of genetic engineering, critics would also evoke the story of creation in the book of Genesis – God created man in his own image and likeness (Gen. 1:27).⁶³ The story of creation conveys meanings about humanity. First, the creator and the creature in the story are two different entities. They are absolutely different with one another and they are not equal with one another. The human person is created in the image and likeness of God; however, it does not mean that he/she is God or can play God. He/she is a creature of God, the creator. That fact cannot be changed. Secondly, the story expresses the equality of all human persons. Human persons' nature is one and the same, and in the language of the story, they are created in the image and likeness of God. The equality of all human beings is that they are created. It means that no human person is created by another human or can create another human. All are created by a Supreme Being that is not human, but God. The human person as created is not the only basis of equality, but also the human person as an image and likeness of God. Human persons, whatever their roles and statuses in life, culture or civilization, and faith or belief, are image and likeness of God. God, the creator, does not give preferential option to a group of people or to a nation to be

⁶³Jurgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2003),

His image and likeness. All human persons are one and the same or equal in this likeness. If there is one being that is exempted from this equality, it is the creator, God. Since human persons are created in one likeness and image, they share the same humanity and dignity. This is the third meaning that the story conveys: The dignity of all human beings that must be recognized and respected. It is a human dignity that springs from their “sameness” as well as from their equality. Each and every human being is a concrete manifestation of that image and likeness; that is why, they must recognize and respect themselves as belonging to the same humanity. It reminds them of the fact that when they interact with each other, they are not simply staring at a human being, but at another human person that reflects his/her own image and likeness.

Habermas’ translation of the story of creation in the book of Genesis is about human dignity and equality. All human persons are equal and all share the same dignity and humanity. No human person is superior over the other and can determine the life of another. Equality and human dignity also entail human being’s freedom. No human person can restraint one’s freedom or can decide for the life of another. And in relation to the issue of genetic engineering, Habermas raises the question: “Would not the first human being to determine, at his own discretion, the natural essence of another human being at the same time destroy the equal freedoms that exist among persons of equal birth in order to ensure their difference?”⁶⁴ Habermas illustrates that a citizen of faith must use the language of dignity, equality and liberty of all human persons in arguing against genetic engineering. It is language that is accessible to all, secular and religious. Instead of arguing in the Biblical language that the human person is created in the image and likeness of God, it is practical for citizen of faith to present the argument in a language that can be understood by people with different worldviews.

Rawls’s Influence to Habermas’ Translation

Habermas’ idea of translation is influenced by John Rawls’s proviso. Rawls explains that in a constitutional democratic society, where institutions are free, the plurality of conflicting reasonable

⁶⁴Ibid., 115.

comprehensive doctrines exists. In this light, citizens of a well ordered democratic society must set aside their comprehensive doctrines and consider the kinds of reason that they can share with one another in addressing fundamental political questions. In public reason, they address each other as citizens and based on the politically reasonable conception of justice, not on comprehensive doctrines. According to Rawls, “central to the idea of public reason is that it neither criticizes nor attacks any comprehensive doctrine, religious or nonreligious, except insofar as that doctrine is incompatible with the essentials of public reason and a democratic society.”⁶⁵ That is why the civil society that includes the religious and nonreligious comprehensive doctrines is relegated by Rawls as “background culture” and such is separate and distinct to public reason. Public reason, as mentioned a while ago, belongs to a well ordered constitutional democratic society. It is the reason that unifies the citizens with varying comprehensive doctrines or belonging to different civil society organizations that are defined by their own set of comprehensive doctrines in such kind of society; hence, Rawls makes a distinction between the “background culture” (which refers to the comprehensive doctrines of civil society groups) and public reason (which belongs to the well ordered constitutional democratic society). The distinction is important for Rawls would like to emphasize that which unites a pluralistic society, public reason. Reason becomes public when it is discussed by the, or it is a discourse of the, members of the legislature, or judiciary, or the chief executive. Not all political questions and discussions of fundamental questions are considered as public. Such questions become public when it is discussed in the realm of public institutions such as the legislative, the judiciary, the executive. Discourses of candidates running for public office are also considered public reason. Rawls also qualifies reason as public when it is the reason or discourse of free and equal citizens, the subject matter of which is the public good, and its nature and content is “expressed in public reasoning by a family of reasonable conceptions of political justice reasonably thought to satisfy the criterion of reciprocity.”⁶⁶ The criterion of

⁶⁵John Rawls, “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited” in *The University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol. 64, Summer 1997, Number 3, 766.

⁶⁶*Ibid*, 767.

reciprocity is essential in public reason.⁶⁷ Public reason, then, is an agreement or consensus among citizens. The content of public reason is that what is considered to be reasonably just and fair by the citizens. In the process of coming up with an agreement that which they considered to be reasonably just and fair, citizens are in original position.⁶⁸ It is a situation where different parties are equally represented and a fair and pure procedure whose outcome is just and fair. For that outcome to be just and fair, participants are behind the veil of ignorance, a situation that completely shut them off from their personal, social, political, cultural, and economic biases and prejudices. It is a situation required for the different parties to come up with reasonable and acceptable principles of justice. In the language of Rawls, they cannot argue based on their religious or non-religious comprehensive doctrines. They have to set their eyes on the formulation of a reasonable and acceptable conception of justice.

Rawls, however, is flexible in the usage of comprehensive doctrines in the conception of political principles of justice as fairness. He explains that “reasonable comprehensive doctrines,

⁶⁷Rawls explains reciprocity as: “Citizens are reasonable when, viewing one another as free and equal in a system of social cooperation over generations, they are prepared to offer one another fair terms of cooperation according to what they consider the most reasonable conception of political justice; and when they agree to act on those terms, even at the cost of their own interests in particular situations, provided that other citizens also accept those terms. The criterion of reciprocity requires that when those terms are proposed as the most reasonable terms of fair cooperation, those proposing them must also think it at least reasonable for other to accept them, as free and equal citizens, and not as dominated or manipulated, or under the pressure of an inferior political or social position. Citizens will of course differ as to which conceptions of political justice they think the most reasonable, but they will agree that all are reasonable, even if barely so” (See Rawls’ “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,” page 770).

⁶⁸In his work, *A Theory of Justice* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), Rawls describes original position as a “status quo in which the parties are equally represented as moral persons and the outcome is not conditioned by arbitrary contingencies or the relative balance of social forces” and as “purely hypothetical situation” (page 120). He further explains that the idea of original position is “to set up a fair procedure so that any principles agreed to will be just” (page 136). Its aim is “to use the notion of pure procedural justice as a basis of theory” (page 136). As a pure procedural justice, participants in the original position are “situated behind the veil of ignorance;” and participants under the veil of ignorance are blinded about certain facts about themselves, i.e., social status, strength and abilities, and certain facts about the society, i.e. economic and political situations, level of civilization and culture (page 137). What they know are general facts that are related to the choice of the principles of justice, i.e., general facts about the society, political affairs, economic theory, basis of social organization and laws of human psychology (page 137). In short participants in original position as pure procedural justice are focused only on the formulation of principles justice that is good and acceptable to all. And to achieve that, they have to be bracketed from their personal, social and cultural prejudices and biases.

religious or nonreligious, may be introduced in public political discussion at any time, provided that in due course proper political reasons – and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrines – are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines introduced are said to support.”⁶⁹ He calls this as proviso – the introduction of comprehensive doctrines into public political discussion for positive reasons.⁷⁰ However, this must be done in good faith, with utmost sincerity and without manipulation. In his notion of proviso, Rawls accepts the social reality that citizens in a pluralistic society cannot get away from the influences of comprehensive doctrines.⁷¹ That is why it is the duty of every citizen, which Rawls calls as duty of civility, to understand one another’s comprehensive doctrines, so that such doctrines can be positively used in political discussion. The mutual understanding of one’s doctrines also breeds acceptance and respect.

Habermas does not agree with Rawls’s idea that comprehensive doctrine when presented in public forum must be supported by proper political reasons. He explains that the proviso is a mental and psychological burden for citizens of faith, because many of them believe that political decisions must be based on their religious convictions alone, and without influence of the secular world; while, others cannot discern on the difference between religious reason and secular reason; and, for some, it is not consistent with their faith to support their religious reason with political or constitutional reason.⁷² Habermas would like also to emphasize the unique role of religion in one’s life – as the source of energy and meaning and as the powerful force that formed one’s mind. Such make the proviso of Rawls impractical to people of faith. However, he agrees with Rawls that religious comprehensive doctrines play cannot be restricted in public political debate or forum. That is why he presents his translation requirement. Instead of using proper political reasons to support religious comprehensive doctrines, citizens of faith present it in a language that accessible to all, and

⁶⁹John Rawls, *The Idea of Public Reason Revisited*, 783-784.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 784.

⁷¹Habermas explains that John Rawls “recognizes that the problems of the political impact of the role of religion in civil society has not been solved by the secularization of the political authority per se. The secularization of the state is not the same as the secularization of society (see “*The Political: The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology*,” page 23).

⁷²Habermas, “*Religion in Public Sphere*,” 14.

such is the secular language. Habermas, in this view, is influenced by Paul Weithmann and Nicholas Wolterstoff. Weithmann argues that religious institutions and argument contribute to the “realized citizenship” of individuals and to a “distinctive and valuable moral vocabulary and set of concerns to democratic political discourse.”⁷³ Wolterstoff, on the other hand, argues against the “general restraint on religious reasons” in political debate and voting and he proposes “listening to others with a willingness to learn and to let one’s mind be changed” as the proper duty of civility.⁷⁴ Habermas, Weithmann and Wolterstoff see the political significance of religion to its members. They do not discount the reality that the whole being of faithful or believer is shaped and transformed by religion. It is impossible and not realistic to require believers to support their religious reason with political or secular reason because of such tremendous influence. But, is Habermas’ translation requirement not guilty of his critique to Rawls’s proviso? Habermas’ reply is that citizens of faith must accept the fact that in a pluralistic society, secular reason and language is the most acceptable and accessible. Furthermore, a secular state is neutral to religious beliefs and reasons; hence, the language of the state is constitutional and legal. Translation is the best option available for citizens of faith to participate in political debates using their religious reason.

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⁷³Baxter, op cit.,197.

⁷⁴Ibid., 198-200.

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