RELIGION’S POLITICAL ROLE IN A RAWLSIAN KEY

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Abstract:
In Political liberalism (expanded edition) Rawls repeatedly urges religions to accept liberal democracy for the right reasons, including reasons that are based on their own religious premises and not simply as a modus vivendi. This article is an exploration of that field. The first part is a hermeneutic analysis of Luke’s account of St Paul’s speech to the Areopagus in Athens, as it tries to find common ground with Hellenistic philosophy by means of deliberative rhetoric. In the second part these two characteristics (i.e. finding common ground and using deliberative rhetoric) are examined as building blocks for intrinsic acceptance of liberal democracy, albeit in a formal rather than a substantive key. The common ground Luke explored was religious, whereas in our day, at least in North-Western Europe, religion is espoused by a cognitive minority. But intercontextual hermeneutics metaphorically permits us to use the following quadratic equation: as the Lucan Paul related the Christian message to his philosophical context in order to find common ground with his listeners, so we have to relate this message to our context, the common ground being not philosophical but political. This article advocates playing a bilingual language game for religion to present its convictions to public debate and, in due course, translate them into the language of public reason. Such translation requires deliberative rhetoric and argumentation, in accordance with the logical and epistemological rules of practical reason.

Key words: religion, political liberalism, hermeneutics.

Ever since my first reading of Political liberalism I have been puzzled by Rawls’ observation that religion should not accept democracy purely as a modus vivendi but on intrinsic grounds. What intrinsic acceptance means and how it comes about is dealt with fragmentarily in the rest of the book. Rawls maintains that it does not have to be based on exclusively political considerations, but on actual religious doctrines also (Rawls 2005, 461). He affirms the view of the Islamic scholar Abdullahi An-Na’im, who argues that Muslim grounds for such acceptance may not be derived from the teachings of the Medina period but from the earlier Mecca period (Rawls 2005, 461, n. 46). However, it is merely suggested and there is no attempt to work out the implications for the Christian religion. Rawls acknowledges Catholics’ right to reject a proposal to pass legislation that legalises abortion, but requires them not to offer violent resistance should such a law be passed by legitimate political institutions according to public reason (Rawls 2005, 480). That is sufficient to legitimise such a law politically, but it is not a religious legitimisation, for the question is actually: on what religious grounds can and should Catholics respect the legislative decisions of legitimate political institutions? Habermas, Rawls’ co-founder of deliberative democracy, does not get us much further. He holds that all major religions should accept the principles of a liberal state in terms of their own premises. In Europe, he says, those derive from the Judaeo-Christian tradition because of its genealogical connection with the evolution of democracy (Habermas 2005, 268–269). Accomplishing this task requires reviewing and reconstructing inherited articles of faith in terms of modern institutions, more specifically political ones (Habermas 2005, 144). To my opinion it is more adequate to speak of the Jewish and Christian traditions in the plural, and consider the genealogical relationship marked equally by moral assent and political conflict, evidenced by many forms of religious persecution, extermination, inquisition, conflict and war, the latter being mentioned also by Rawls (2005, 476–477, n. 75). In any case, Rawls takes the challenge that this entails concretely: “How is it possible for those affirming a religious doctrine that is based on religious authority, for example, the Church or the Bible, also to hold a reasonable politi-
cal conception that supports a just democratic regime?” (Rawls 2005, xxxvii–xxxviii, 458–460). An intrinsic religious acceptance is also required, since this helps to clarify the difference between the role of being a member of a religious community and that of being a citizen, in one and the same person. This makes the challenge to such religious legitimisation all the more pressing and weighty.

Are political theorists justified in dismissing the problem in this way? Is it not part of their professional task to mark out a trail in the religio-political terra incognita in which we operate and map it for us? Do the positive functions attributed to religion in a socio-political context (e.g. strengthening morality, public order and cohesion), as well as its negative functions (e.g. religious ideologising of conflict, struggle and war), not call for systematic reflection on the relation between religion and democracy? Rawls probably turned his back on the religious task because he was opposed to the holocaust and even more fiercely to the nuclear attacks on Japan, which were allegedly permitted by God’s will (Maffetone 2010, 3–4). But quite apart from these profound theodicy problems and despite his resistance to the orthodox Christian view of God’s will, to those who knew Rawls personally he remains someone with “a deeply religious temperament that informed his life and writings” (Cohen & Nagel 2009, 5). This is evident in his statement On my religion, which reveals a kind of universal faith in God, a generic theism (Adams 2009, 101). In fact, Rawls there confesses that he was fascinated by the constitutional lawyer Jean Bodin’s Colloquium heptapleromes de rerum sublimium arcanis abditis of 1588 (Cohen & Nagel 2009, 23; Rawls 2009, 266). The book is a detailed record of a discussion between a Jew, a Catholic, a Calvinist, a Lutheran, a Muslim, a philosophical naturalist and a sceptic, concluding with a quotation from one of the participants, the Catholic Coroneus: “Lo, how good and pleasing it is for brothers to live in unity, arranged not in common diatonics or chromatics [i.e. polyphony and counterpoint, condemned by the church – VdV], but in enharmonics with a certain, divine modulation.” In the end Bodin concludes: “However, afterwards they held no other conversation about religions, although each one defended his own religion with the supreme sanctity of his life” (Bodin 1975, 471). This silence may have inspired Rawls, or maybe he recognised himself in it and saw fit to dispense with systematic public reflection on (his own) religion.

In any case, this article is, at least partly, my (audacious) attempt to fill the gap that Rawls left. Why partly? I confine myself to legitimatising democracy on the basis of a few concepts that are peculiar to the Christian religion, leaving aside other religions for pragmatic reasons only as I am not a specialist in any of them. To that end I make a hermeneutic analysis of a pertinent pericope from the Acts of the Apostles by the evangelist Luke, the fifth book in the New Testament. It centres on Paul’s address to the Areopagus in Athens. The way Luke depicts Paul and the discourse that, according to Luke, he conducted en plein public yields some hermeneutic concepts that are relevant to the role of religion in the public sphere (part 1). These concepts are not meant to provide a religious legitimisation of every facet of democracy as a whole, but merely of Rawls’s notion of the role of religion in the deliberative public debate. I see this not as a contribution to theology but, via religious studies, to political theory (part 2).1

1 Hermeneutic analysis of the account of Paul’s address to the Areopagus

The Areopagus, situated near the Acropolis in Athens, was famous in antiquity. It was the name of a hill about 100 metres high, the hill of Ares (Areios pagos). It was also the name of the building which

1Both theology and religious studies are concerned with the Christian religion and other religions, albeit in terms of different formal objects, and both use insider and outsider perspectives. The relevant features of religious studies (for the purpose of this article) are its object, goal and freedom of research. The object is not God, but faith in God or gods, or even more broadly: religion/religions, in terms of their historical and present identity, including bio-ecological, psychological, social, cultural, political and legal aspects. The aim is to describe, explain and interpret religion, using literary, historical, empirical and systematic methods. The premise is not to affirm or deny the existence of God or gods in a metaphysical sense, but in that description, explanation and interpretation to dispense, epistemologically, with any active or passive divine intervention. The distinction between metaphysical and epistemological is crucial. Freedom of research implies that the criteria of establishing truth are not divine revelation, religious tradition or authority, but human reason before the religious forum (Van der Ven 2010a, 88–131, 155–156 en 334, n. 95).
on this hill housed the council of the city state Athens, an administrative and advisory council for judicial, cultural, moral and religious affairs. The council formed part of the administrative centre of Athens, which for centuries had been known as the cultural capital of the inhabited world.

1.1 Paul’s address according to Luke’s classical text

Luke’s account of Paul’s address is a classical text that has consistently intrigued many successive generations up to the present. Like all classical texts, it opens up a perspective on questions that have always occupied, and continue to occupy, human beings. It stimulates, challenges, provokes and shocks. It can bring the reader to true recognition and acknowledgment both of prevailing conditions of human life and of possible conditions for the future. It may, in fact, transform the reader (Gadamer 1986, 87–133, 290–312). This also applies to Paul’s speech before the Areopagus in Athens. Viewed retrospectively, its earth-shaking significance is apparent at the interface of two cultures: those of Jerusalem and Athens, Judaic religious culture and Greek Hellenistic culture. What concerns us is how in this Lucan narrative Paul bridges the divide between these two cultures. There is every reason to delve into this question, for in our time we, too, are at the interface of various religious and nonreligious cultures.

The account of the oration

The Lucan account of Paul’s address, we have said, forms part of the Acts of the Apostles. According to that book Paul ended up in Athens on his second major missionary journey, probably in 52 CE, after his tour of Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece. The assumption is that stories about this visit that were in circulation were reconstructed and produced in narrative form by Luke, the author of Acts, resulting in the text we have today. That was probably about two generations later, towards the end of the first or the start of the second century. It means that

The character in this article is Paul according to the author of the book of Acts, in which Paul plays a leading role. In other words, we are looking at the Lucan Paul.

To any number of authors in antiquity ‘acts’ constitute a literary genre recounting the great deeds of cities and nations. In early Christianity ‘acts’ are a familiar genre recording the great deeds of the apostles (Klauck 2008). The New Testament Acts tells a story mainly about Peter and Paul. In Paul’s case it is interesting to note the diverse ways in which Luke deals with various types of orations (Witherington, 511, n. 180): those to a Christian audience (29: 18–35), a Jewish audience (13:16–41) and a Hellenistic audience (17:22–33). Luke also writes about orations with a forensic objective (22:1–21; 24:10–21; 25:8–12; 26:1–23; 28:17–20; 28:25–28). Another point of interest is how Paul handles the different contexts in which, according to Luke, he proclaimed his message, such as Samaria where he was confronted with a kind of magical religion (Ac 5:8ff.), his defence before the Roman magistrates (Ac 24:10ff.), or his address in the presence of philosophers in the Areopagus (Ac 17:16ff.), which is the focus of this article. However variegated the stories, including the one about the speech to the Areopagus, collectively they represent a narrative construction by the writer, Luke.

By and large the story of that address boils down to the following (Ac 17:16–34). After only a brief stay in Athens, the story starts, Paul was perturbed by the many statues of gods displayed in that city. We are told that he spoke to Jews in the synagogue and argued with everybody he met in the market place, among them philosophers from the Epicurean school and Stoics. These observed that he was preaching about foreign deities. It caused a stir. They asked for a more detailed explanation, because his teaching struck them as strange. “What do you mean?” they asked him. They took hold of him (epi-labomenoi) and brought him (egagon) to the Areopagus. The fact that they were surprised or concerned is understandable, since the Athenian polis was characterised by a close relation between religion, society and politics. Religion ensured social cohesion and provided a symbolic universe. Society Jews (Antiquitates Judaicae) by the author of Acts, which leads to a dating around 100 or later.

I thank my colleague Jan van der Watt for his comments on the first part of this paper.
had its administrative machinery that was integrated with the state. The state was not an institution separate from society, as it is to a greater or lesser extent in our day, but a ‘society state’ (Anderson 2009). Hence any change in religion could cause society and the state to change, thus jeopardising social stability.

Faced with the Areopagus, Luke tells us, Paul launched into his oration. He started by observing that the Athenians were highly religious. Not only were there altars for all the gods known to everyone in the city, he said, but also one bearing the inscription ‘To an unknown god’ (17:22–23). Then he comes to the crux of his address (17:24–31), in which he expounds who this unknown God is. He is the God who created everything, but does not dwell in temples. Neither does he need to be served in temples: he does not need anything. Indeed, it is he who gives life and breath to everybody. He appointed the seasons and inhabitable areas. His intention is that people should seek him and, gropingly, find him. In Luke’s version Paul says that finding God is not difficult, for “he is not far from each one of us”. To this he adds: “In him we live and move and have our being.” And, Luke records, Paul says: “As even some of your own poets have said, we too are his offspring.” Then, according to Acts, Paul informs his listeners that God calls them to start a new life. In concluding the address he refers to a man appointed by God to judge humankind, a man that he raised from the dead.

**Origin and function of the story of the speech**

This narrative has been called the climax of Acts (Von Harnack 1924, 103), as well as the most Hellenistic part of the most Hellenistic book in the New Testament (Van der Horst 1988, 9–36, 10). This raises the question of the origin of the ideas in the story.

This origin is traced to the Judaeco-Hellenistic diaspora in the Middle East. In this diaspora Jews practised their religion by means of beliefs and practices that they picked up in the Hellenistic life world in which they found themselves. As a result Judaism was influenced by Hellenism and, conversely, Hellenism, especially the later Stoics, were subject to Semitic influence via Jewish propaganda (Norden 1974, 10 and 122). This mutual influencing was basic to constant interaction between Judaism and Hellenism, so close that there is often a strong likeness between Hellenistic and Jewish texts. Against this background Paul’s speech as recorded by Luke contains a substratum of ideas shared with the Athenian audience, the Stoics and Epicureans – a common ground (Von Harnack 1924, 392; Norden 1974, 127).

The origin of the ideas in the speech is one thing, their goal is another. That goal can only be determined by looking at the aim of the book of Acts as a whole. In traditional biblical exegesis the question of the aim of Acts was approached in diverse ways (Torkki 2005, 338–340). One was to read the book as an historical account of the ministry of the apostles, especially Peter and Paul (cf. Lüdemann 2002). But in the case of the address to the Areopagus that approach was abandoned. A second approach is dogmatic. It sought to harmonise Acts with subsequent ecclesiastic and theological doctrinal pronouncements. But this method led to fruitless and even fatal confessional debates between and within churches. They were also based on anachronism, as though the oration was directed to specialists in later confessional orthodoxy rather than to philosophers in antiquity. A third approach is missiological. Paul’s speeches, including the one in Athens, are seen as instances of missionary preaching. But the primary aim of Paul’s ministry in Athens was not to convert his listeners. It was to present the Christian religion as a credible paideia, that is a

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4 In Pergamum (Asia Minor) and Mesopotamia inscriptions have been found with the text, ‘to the unknown gods’, but these are later than the 1st century. They function as an ex voto (Pervo 2009, 433) in the framework of theodicy: evil that befalls people unexpectedly and undervely is partly attributed to foreign gods, whose mercy is invoked in supplicatory prayer (Van der Horst 1988; 1998; Van der Toorn 1985, 94–97). Paul’s speech does not mention an inscription in the polytheistic plural (‘to the unknown gods’), like those found elsewhere, but in the henotheistic or monotheistic singular (‘to the unknown god’). What was the reason for this change, and when and where did it happen (Norden 1974, 121)? No such inscription has been found in Athens. It could be that the reference is not to an inscription but to the actual dedication of an altar to an ‘unknown god’ (Dibelius 1939, 16; Pesch 1986, 136). In a narrative analysis of Acts such questions are less weighty if the expression ‘to the unknown god’ is seen as a literary motif (Von Harnack 1913, 33), of which there are parallels in books later than Acts (Taylor 1994, 289–294). It is not a matter of the metaphysical unknowability of the ‘unknown god’ as a form of negative theology (Dibelius 1939, 21–22), but of actual foreignness (Van der Horst, 1988, 24ff.).
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guideline for education, morals and culture – one that could stand up to Hellenistic paideia.

Rather than an historical, dogmatic or missiological approach, I settle for a narrative analysis of the address, combined with rhetorical analysis. This entails taking the text of the address as an account of a plastic episode in Paul’s ministry with a dramatic quality (Plümacher 1972; Torkki 2004; 2005). The aim of the story is rhetorical, as indicated above: presenting the Christian religion as a plausible paideia. To this end it employs a special form of rhetoric – the deliberative kind. While still aimed at influencing, it operates argumentatively, not emotionally; it seeks to persuade rather than to convince.

To underscore the credibility of the Christian religion the address, according to Luke’s account, is not set in some obscure town but in the illustrious city of Athens, a small city to be sure, at that time not comparable to Antioch or Alexandria, but still with an age-old philosophical and cultural reputation. Hence it is staged as a debate, not with ordinary urbanites, but with intellectuals, at that time the Stoics and Epicureans. And it does not occur just ‘somewhere’ in Athens, but in the Areopagus, the centre par excellence of education, morality, culture, politics and law. Finally, that is why, as will be seen, the story refers to Socrates, classical representative of the philosophical quest for freedom and truth – in that order.

Commentary on the verses of the text

Let us look more closely at the verses of the account of the address and see how the common ground of biblical and Hellenistic motifs features in them.5

22 Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said: “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. 23 For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god’. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

Is verse 22 merely a ritual opening sentence to establish contact with the audience, a captatio benevolentiae to gain the Athenians’ favour (Conzelmann 1972, 106) – simply a rhetorical tactic? Or does it take the story straight to its substantive core? To the author of Acts it was essentially, as noted above, a matter of putting the common ground of Christian and Hellenistic beliefs in the spotlight, hence I see the opening sentence as a substantive statement. “Athenians,” he has Paul say, “I see how extremely religious you are.” Verse 23 is a continuation of this statement. According to Luke Paul says that they are so religious that they even have an altar inscribed “To an unknown god”. This serves as a substantive link with Paul’s key message.

24 The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things.

What is the key message? Many exegetes claim that for Paul the unknown God to whom the Athenians brought offerings was actually God, the creator of the world. But is creation in fact the theme sustaining the address (Conzelmann 1972, 107; Pesch 1986, 136)? Or is it just a secondary theme supporting the main theme, which is criticism of the Athenian altar and temple rituals, especially those performed before idols – a cardinal theme of Judaic religious critique (Assmann 2000; 2001; 2003)? Paul remonstrates with the Athenians that they pray at the altar of an unknown God, knowing full well that this God, unlike idols, is not made by human hands and does not need offerings, for he is not a human creation but the very source of creation. The focal point is rejection of the idolatrous cult; the legitazimation is creation (Witherington 1998, 531).

The temple criticism does not contrast Hellenistic polytheism with biblical monotheism, nor the pantheon of gods with the one, henotheistic god. There is no explicit reference to this in the text. It is all the more striking because there was a clear trend towards henotheism, even monotheism emerging in Hellenism (Nock 1986, 56–57). The real contrast is between a fabricated and a living God, a visible and an invisible God. The focus is not on the existence of either God or many gods, but on the manner of worship. God has no need of supplicatory or propitiatory offers, of food, drink or clothing. More than

that, being the giver of life to all humans, it is he who fulfils their needs, not the other way round.

This ritual criticism rests on common ground in the Bible and Hellenistic philosophy (Bornkamm 1969, 30–35; Witherington 1998, 525–526; Pervo 2009, 432). Rejection of idolatry can be found throughout the Jewish Bible (Is 1:10–20; 40:19–20; 44:9–20; 44: 9–20; 46:6; Jer 6:20; Wisdom 13), and in the works of numerous Greek and Hellenistic authors, especially among the Stoics (Conzelmann 1972, 107), even though neither the Stoics nor the Epicureans abstained from worship, at least as it occurred publicly (Nock 1986, 59). God’s lack of any needs also has sources in both the Jewish Bible (e.g. Ps 50: 8–13; Pesch 1986, 137) and Hellenism, especially among the Stoics (Pervo 2009, 435) and the Epicureans because of the gods’ perfect happiness, even though they are not accorded the role of creators (De Witt 1976, 249). God does not want for or need anything.

26 From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, 27 so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him — though indeed he is not far from each one of us.

Verse 26 starts with the myth of Adam, but without mentioning his name. It is not a question of the creaturely origin of all people in one man, Adam, as taught by monogenism in contrast to polygenism. It is a matter of the unity of the human race intended by God. It suggests that the Christian paideia is destined for all people, as stated afterwards in verse 29. The same unity was propounded by the Stoics (Pesch 1986, 137; Pervo 2009, 435). The key Greek terms used in this context – the Greek kairos, rendered as ‘times of their existence’, and horothesiai, rendered as ‘boundaries of places’ – can also be interpreted more abstractly as God’s creative grace in time and space (Pervo 2009, 436). That contains the germ of not just a biblical but also a Stoic notion of divine providence (Piettre 2004, 60).

The next verse (27) reflects God’s gentle character: His intention is that humans should go in search of him, which may take a lifetime, for it is conducted off the beaten track, gropingly, almost like a blind person. The optative ‘perhaps find him’ (europoi) indicates that finding him may well be beyond human reach (Conzelmann 1972, 109; Pervo 2009, 437). What is needed is to decipher the traces of divine providence in nature and history (Pervo, 2009, 429–430). This search for God and desire to find him may be seen as an allusion to the Jewish Bible (Wisdom 13:6), but also to Stoicism, which sees creation and providence as mutually implicit (Norden 1974, 16–17; Pesch 1986, 138; Pervo 2009, 430). The search may emanate from the will or be conducted mentally. In contrast with the Jewish Bible (Deut 4:29; Is 55:6), the reference here is to a mental quest. In that case finding God is not taken for granted (Conzelmann 1972, 109). Again there are Hellenistic parallels (Dibelius 1939, 9–10).

But it is perfectly possible gropingly to find God, for he is never far from anybody. Indeed, the psalms constantly point out that he is close by (Ps 139:7), as does Stoic literature, for instance Seneca (Epistula 41:1): “God is close to you, with you, in you.” This suggests God’s inherence in human beings, which has a parallel in the Epicurean rejection of fear of the gods in folk religion. The gods in fact cherish friendship and love towards humankind (De Witt 1976, 250).

28 For ‘in him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring’. 29 Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals.
Verse 28 starts with a triad, elaborating on the intimate relationship between God and humans. It constitutes the core of Hellenistic testimony, where-as it is foreign to the Bible. Thus in a prayer to Zeus in Epimenides’s Cretica Minos says: “You live and stay for ever, for in you we live, move and have our being” (Conzelmann 1972, 109. This is not Parmenides’s immovable God but the moving God, the source and process of becoming (Piettre 2004, 60). There are other Greek and Hellenistic parallels combining two of the three concepts, ‘live’, ‘move’ and ‘being’, inter alia in Plato (Timaeus 37c), and especially in the Stoics Seneca and Cicero (Norden 1974, 19–24).

Many exegetes emphasise the opening expression of the verse, ‘in him’ (en autoi), so as to obviate the interpretation, ‘through him’. The latter suggests distance, whereas ‘in him’ does not. This ‘in him’ indicates an inverse ‘inherence’, that of humans in God (Dibelius 1939, 31–32). In other words, the inherence is reciprocal: God inheres in people, they inhere in him. Here inherence refers to inner rather than external ties. God is intimately linked with humans, and they with God.

Reciprocal inherence expresses the relationship between God and humans more accurately than the paired concepts of transcendence and immanence or theism and pantheism that exegetes often use in expounding this verse. The trouble with these latter concepts is that they are fraught with a surfeit of conflicts about orthodoxy both within and between Christian denominations. The same applies to the concept of panentheism, which supposedly falls midway between theism and pantheism, but which some exegetes slant towards theism and others towards pantheism (Von Harnack 1913, 23, n.1; Dibelius 1939, 25 Pervo 2009, 438). All these concepts obscure the ‘interwovenness’ of God and humans.

Verse 28 concludes with the quotation, “For we too are his offspring.” Exegetes’ usual response to this line, the only non-biblical poetic quotation in the New Testament, is astonishment, shock or silence (Clivaz 2005, 491). This is prompted by the accompanying comment that this quotation stems from Hellenism, namely from “some of your own poets”. Which ones? Their names are not mentioned. Exegesis proposes Aristobulus, a Jewish philosopher in Alexandria in the 2nd century BCE, who linked Judaism with Hellenistic thought. He cited the poet Aratos on the intimate relation between God and humans: “we are all his children” (Phaenomena 5; Conzelmann 1972, 110; Torkki 2004, 162–165). Another reference is to a parallel in the hymn to Zeus by Cleanthes (Pesch 1986,139, n. 42).

The quotation indicates humans’ descent from God, hence the unity of the human race. The theme of divine descent is by no means foreign to biblical thought but neither to Hellenistic ideas either, evidenced for instance by Seneca (Dibelius 1939, 30–32). The theme of the unity of the human race has parallels with the notions of sophists and cynics about the brotherhood of all people (Nock 1986, 58). Luke included it in Paul’s address, because the Christian message was intended not only for Jews but for all people, especially those who stemmed from the Hellenistic legacy of Alexander the Great. In his oration Paul completes that legacy, which embraced the inhabited world (oikoumenē), in a religious sense (Nock 1986, 69).

Finally verse 29 reverts to the theme of verse 24. Paul again adjures his audience about the impropriety of temple rituals to images of gods, whether made of gold, silver or stone. They are not like the deity. The text does not say ‘like God’, but ‘like the deity’ (to theion), a hapax in the New Testament, but familiar to Hellenistic Judaism (Conzelmann 1972, 110). Those who bring offerings in the temple should know better, for according to the author we are God’s offspring. Again we discern that the sustaining theme of the address is not creation but the reciprocal inherence of God and humans and the criticism of idolatrous rituals implicit in it.

30 While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

Having completed the main theme, the author has Paul work up to a conclusion. It is actually quite abrupt, there is no transition. Its abruptness also lies in the way the deliberative rhetoric, aimed at argumentation and persuasion, makes way for a kerygmatic intention. Even more striking is the contrast between the preceding verses, in which biblical and Hellenistic motifs converge, and the theme from verse 30 onwards, which is explicitly Christian. It is an
exaggeration to call the entire address a Hellenistic speech with only a Christian conclusion (Dibelius 1939, 36), for it derives from the Judaeo-Hellenistic diaspora and throughout Acts Paul displays an unmistakably Christian orientation. Nonetheless the difference between the conclusion and the preceding verses is striking, so much so that some aver that the essential message is conveyed only in these verses. On the other hand verses 30 and 31 could also be seen as a more or less separate passage that, in contrast to the preceding deliberative rhetorical themes, contains an explicit missionary programme. Like the missionary preaching in the First Letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1: 9–10), these two verses concern the following aspects: turning away from idolatrous rituals and turning towards God, judgment and resurrection – with no mention of creation (Pichler 1997, 52).

In contrast with the letter to the Romans (Rom 1:16–32; 2:12–16), in Acts (17: 30) the Lucan Paul refrains from charging his audience with their ‘heathen’ rituals in the past. He simply rejects these and for the rest leaves the past alone. He does not rub it in that they had ignored the God they could have known and whom he is now proclaiming. Probably they had searched for him but failed to find him. Neither does he command them to repent. He merely tells them, in indirect speech, that God does not dwell on their past but calls them to embark on a new life.

In verse 31 judgment and resurrection are mentioned together. The accent is on judgment rather than resurrection, as the text suggests (Witherington 1998, 518). Resurrection legitimizes judgment by a man whom God appointed for that purpose, as the text puts it (cf. Kahl 2009). The judgment will be righteous and will apply to the entire inhabited world. The man to deliver that judgment is Jesus, who is not mentioned by name. Possibly this anonymity was meant to present Paul as an orator innocent of proclaiming foreign gods. Or maybe Luke wanted to convey that Paul’s earlier conversations in the market place about Jesus and the resurrection had led to an unfortunate misconception: Jesus was not a foreign god and his resurrection (anastasis in 17:18) not a foreign goddess, as the listeners thought (Pesch 1986, 140).

**Common ground and deliberative rhetoric**

To sum up, rhetorical analysis of the story of Paul’s address before the Areopagus has identified two features. The first concerns the question of why Luke has Paul combine Judaic and Hellenistic ideas. Why does he even use purely Hellenistic ideas, such as those about Zeus, that have no link with Judaism? The reason was that he wanted Paul to establish rapport with the cultural elite of Athens. It was a matter of finding common ground. He shows that the ‘foreign religion’ Paul was introducing corresponds with the thinking of the elite, with whom he was determined to find common ground.

The second feature pertains to the rhetoric Paul uses in this account. He does not try to persuade his audience by playing on their emotions or bombarding them with authoritative arguments. He completely abstains from religious manipulation and indoctrination. He does not try to persuade them but to convince them. His rhetoric centres on argumentation – a deliberative rhetoric. The arguments he advances are aimed at balanced appraisal. I return to these two features in more detail below.

**Socrates and Paul**

The aforementioned two features are also observable in the speeches of another remarkable historical character not mentioned in any verse in the story of Paul’s address. But references in the story to this classical authority and the judicial process he underwent, also before the council of the city state Athens, are too blatant simply to be ignored.

As we have said, the story starts with Paul being suspected of introducing foreign gods in Athens (Ac 17:18). Such suspicions are a recurring topic in the history of the city. A few centuries earlier similar suspicions were fomented against Socrates, a universally admired figure, and are recorded in many writings, including those of Plato. These alleged that he sought to spread new notions and practices involving new gods among the Athenian youth. That was considered a grave danger to the paideia and the symbolic universe, hence to social cohesion and stability in the polis. In Luke’s story Paul was under similar suspicion.

For that reason, the account tells us, Paul was brought before the Areopagus, where a charge was laid against him, as had happened to Socrates. As noted already, the Areopagus was an administrative and advisory body, also for ordinary and extraordinary legal cases (Schubert 2000). The inquiry that was made – probably a sort of inquest – had to find out what Paul’s new doctrine entailed. A similar inquiry was conducted in the case against Socrates, who was 70 years old at the time. And, like Socrates,
Paul – in Luke’s version – made a speech in his own defence before that council (Plato 2008, 99–139). Both expounded their historically rooted faith in their God or gods and tried to establish common ground with their audience. Both adduced supporting arguments and tried to win over that audience by convincing it rather than through persuasion: they made use of deliberative rhetoric. In the account recorded by Plato Socrates does so provocatively, ironically, yet authentically. Paul was not concerned about his own credibility but about the Christian religion as a credible paideia. At all events, in both cases freedom of religious expression was at issue: were they permitted to present the religion they adhered to in a public forum? But the denouements of the two stories differ dramatically. Socrates was condemned to death by poison, a process he underwent with dignity, according to his friends, as befitting a good, wise man of integrity (Plato 2008, 149–227). Paul managed to exonerate himself, a remarkable fact considering that the introduction of new gods was a grave offence (Pervo 2009, 425–428). We are told that at the end of his speech he left the assembly without further ado, a free man. Thus, by analogy, Paul is imbued with Socrates’s aura (Plümacher 1972, 19) – a kind of second Socrates (Plümacher 1972, 97–98).

The account of Paul’s address to the Areopagus in the Christian tradition

The pericope about Paul’s ministry in Athens is not some random excerpt from a biblical book. In Acts Luke, one of the four evangelists, portrays Paul as a Jew to the Jews, a Greek to the Greeks and, as appears from the sequel to Acts, a Roman to the Romans, using the languages and cultures of his time (Piettre 2004, 62). He also presents Paul as a bridge builder between the Judaic and Hellenistic cultures by establishing common ground. He is an authoritative witness to a Hellenistic Christian religion. The story has been the object of many commentaries and much reflection in patristic times, the Middle Ages and the Reformation (Lackmann 1952, 285–363), as well as early modernity (Bodin 1975; Milton 973; Spinoza 1992, 399–401) and the modern era (Ricoeur 1992a, 315; 2007, 105). It is part of the present-day cultural heritage (Kenny 2010, 87, 997; Price & Thonemann 2010, 322).

The fact that Paul’s testimony in the Lucan story is not just a peripheral phenomenon in the Christian tradition but actually an authoritative testimony that touches its very core is evident from two elements of Catholic liturgy. The first is the official three-year cycle known as years A, B and C, which prescribes the biblical readings in Eucharistic services. According to this cycle the account of Paul’s address to the Areopagus is not read merely once every three years, but every year, being the first reading on Wednesday of the sixth week of Easter. The second element is even more interesting. One of the two purely Hellenistic verses in the narrative – “In you we live and move and have our being” (v.28) – is focal in the preface introducing the core of the Eucharist, the prayer at the communion table. On ordinary Sundays throughout the year this preface is prayed or sung, and it appears as preface VI in the American Sacramentary (p. 440), officially laid down by the Catholic Church. Can it be viewed as anything other than an officially sanctioned form of Hellenistic-Christian syncretism at the very core of Catholic liturgy?

Interim reflection

Paul’s address to the Areopagus is a classical text. A text is not classical because it has withstood the test of time but, I have said, because it can bring the reader to the truth of recognition and acknowledgment – recognition and acknowledgment both of the present-day circumstances of human life, and of potential conditions with a view to the future. This applies to the account of Paul’s address to the Areopagus.

This poses the challenge of testing this classical text’s meaning for our time, realising that its meaning cannot be discovered as if it were given in advance, but has to be constructed anew in every era. The question is not simply what Luke’s story about Paul means for our time, as if it can be applied directly to the present age. That would be what Schleiermacher in the early 19th century called a ‘lax practice’ (Wils 1997, 11). Luke’s context and ours are not the same. They are separated by a distance of 20 centuries. The real question is: what would Paul have said had he lived in our context, what would have been his paideia for our age? I phrase it tentatively: ‘had he lived in our context’. What I say below does not reflect reality, for he did not live in our age. Any attempt at constructive interpretation cannot avoid what I would call a hypothetical irrealis potentialis. That is to say, my ques-
tion is unrealistic (*irrealis*), but the meaning we assign the text may well open up new possibilities for the future (*potentialis*).

In so doing I am in good company. Paul probably visited Athens in 52 CE, but we have said that Luke, the author of Acts, probably wrote his account some two generations later in the late 1st or early 2nd century. The author attempted an interpretive reconstruction. I emulate him in making mine. We cannot but take the fact seriously that the meaning of the narrative depends on differing contexts – Paul’s, Luke’s and our own. Telling stories and expounding them consists in deciphering their different meanings in different contexts in a never ending reconstruction process (Ricoeur 1992b; 2000). What is needed is an inter-contextual hermeneutics – that is, if we are not to lapse into ‘lax’ exegesis.

What is the cardinal difference between Paul’s and Luke’s context in Athens at that time and the North-Western European context today? There are any number of answers to this question, but the one most pertinent to this article is what sociologists call the functional differentiation of modern society. In a nutshell, this complex process that spans several centuries from the late Middle Ages and early modernity up to our time boils down to the following. In premodern times religion dominated society inasmuch as all actions and interactions, individual and institutional ones alike, were regulated, legitimatised and integrated, either directly or indirectly, by religion. But in modern times that hierarchically structured heavenly canopy imploded. The cause was the differentiation of society into functional systems that are not guided by God’s will, divine providence or ‘the invisible hand’ (Adam Smith), but by their own codes, rules and programmes in relative autonomy. Examples are the economic, political, legal, social and cultural systems, as well as the religious system. Religion has become one of many systems, alongside them and not above them. It has lost its overarching function. It is relevant to society only insofar as it is relevant to the other systems and to people and their roles in these systems. I cannot dwell on the process here as I have done elsewhere (Van der Ven 2010a, 359–372). I merely highlight one of its consequences for religion: the secularisation process that is steadily gaining ground in many European countries (Norris & Inglehart 2005). In many European countries today, at any rate in North-Western Europe, believers constitute a (cognitive) minority. The chief division in the population is no longer between Catholics and Protestants, nor between Christians and adherents of other religions like Judaism or Islam, but between religious and nonreligious people, that is those who, in terms of their experience and appraisal, identify themselves as either religious or not.

2 From the Areopagus to the role of religion in a deliberative public debate

The foregoing hermeneutic analysis of Luke’s account of Paul’s address to the Areopagus serves a clearly defined purpose: in what follows I hope to show that the way Paul shaped his speech, according to Luke’s description, could religiously substantiate Rawls’ view of the role of religion in public debate. There are two main themes: common ground and deliberative rhetoric.

Common ground

Our analysis raises the following question. In the account of Paul’s speech common ground is found in the self-evident status of religion in the city-state Athens, even though religions were locked in mutual competition. In the present-day context there is no religious common ground, considering the plurality of religious and nonreligious world-views. Can we find common ground anywhere else? One could look for a common basis for religious and nonreligious worldviews in an underlying philosophical structure that links them together, as opposed to an underlying religious structure. But in view of the multiplicity of philosophies in modern times no such philosophical structure is available: there is no universal or even homogeneous philosophy (Rawls 1985, 223ff). The 20th century alone had many major schools, such as philosophy of life (Bergson), phenomenology (Husserl), existential philosophy (Sartre), hermeneutic philosophy (Heidegger), analytical philosophy (*Wiener Kreis*) and postmodern philosophy (Lyotard). Rawls also maintains that philosophy itself does not have “a form of

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7 In hermeneutics the ‘application model’, which assumes a one-to-one relation between the original meaning of a text and its meaning today, is countered by inter-contextual hermeneutics (Losonczi 2012.). The latter works with a kind of quadratic equation: the present context relates to the present meaning of the text as the early context relates to the text’s meaning in that age (Schillebeeckx 1983; 1989; Boff 1987; Van der Ven 1990, 55–56; 2010, 191–192).
argument that will always prove convincing against all other arguments. There is,” he continues, “no such argument.” A little later on he argues that “Peoples may often have final ends that require them to oppose one another without compromise” (Rawls 1999, 123).

The pluralism of philosophies can also not be dismissed by seeking common ground in the doctrine of natural law, as though reflection on ‘nature’ or ‘human nature’ can or must lead to overlapping consensus (Van der Ven 2010a, 187–225; 2011). What nature is, let alone human nature, is a complex problem in itself considering the advances of evolutionary biology, and the life sciences and cognitive sciences, as well as the intertwining of nature and culture. What natural law consists in is equally ambivalent. For Thomas Aquinas (SThI-II, 91), a classical authority, natural law was intrinsically linked with eternal law – God – in which natural law participates. The rare Lutheran and Calvinist interpretations of natural law likewise have religious overtones, especially if their original sources in the 16th and 17th centuries are taken into account (Witte 2007; Nissen 2010). In that time there was even a distinction between natural law before the fall and natural law after the fall. Which natural rights are covered by natural law is equally debatable. In view of their historical and cultural variations they have no universal validity (Porter 2009). In 18th century Protestantism, moreover, natural law gradually detached itself from religion and largely disappeared (Bernardi 2007). Along with the ancien régime it fell victim to the guillotine of the French Revolution (Schmale 1995, 22). Nowadays – with one exception – it is no more than an internal, insulated language game in the Catholic tradition, which itself is by no means free from dissent. Thus the argument of the Jesuit John Murray, whom Rawls (2005, If, 477) cites respectfully, to ground religious freedom in natural law evokes mixed reactions. Some Catholics experience it as too Catholic, considering the opposition to it in other denominations and religions. According to Griffin (1997) in his article, “Good Catholics should be Rawlsian liberals,” others feel it is not religious enough. Natural law simply cannot provide common ground with other religious, and especially nonreligious, beliefs (Van der Ven 2012). This is very evident from the Vatican’s attempt to incorporate ‘natural law’ and ‘natural rights’ into the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). It came unstuck because of the response of German Lutherans, who insisted that in that case the crux of the Lutheran creed also be included, and the reproach of monopolization from representatives of other religious and nonreligious persuasions (Morsink 1999, 269–280; Vögele 2000).

**Political common ground**

If common ground for religious and nonreligious worldviews cannot be found in an underlying religious structure, as was possible in Paul’s case, nor in a philosophical structure, nor in a foundational structure in nature, what other ‘candidate’ is there?

I believe that John Rawls’ political theory offers a possibility. The political structure that is central to his theory offers all-encompassing religious and nonreligious worldviews (he calls them comprehensive doctrines) reasonably adequate scope to participate in the deliberative debate in the public sphere. To my mind this structure offers common ground. It has three characteristics.

The first concerns acceptance of democracy for the right reasons. Rawls consistently stresses that religious and nonreligious participants in the public debate should accept the basic principles of constitutional democracy because of their intrinsic value. They are: freedom and equality as reflected in civil liberties and rights, plus opportunities to realise these; the rule of law; and the majority principle (Rawls 2005, xlv, 6, 156–157, 450; Maffetone 2010, 57). It is not just a matter of accepting these principles as a modus vivendi for opportunistic reasons, for instance because they are part and parcel of present-day conventions, or because they yield temporary gains and can be thrown overboard as soon as they are no longer profitable. An example of this is the thesis/hypothesis doctrine of the Catholic Church since the 18th century. It decreed that in countries where Catholics formed the majority the minority need not enjoy religious tolerance, but where Catholics were a minority they were entitled to tolerance. This doctrine provoked charges of opportunism (mauvaise foi) against the church (Aubert 1952; Dondeyne 1962, 221–224; Schillebeeckx 1966, 196–199). It conflicts with what Rawls (2005, 459) calls acceptance of democracy ‘for the right reasons’. The Second Vatican Council revoked it (Gaudium et Spes, 1965, no. 73). But intrinsic acceptance of democratic principles is not enough. Religions also
have the task, we have said, to promote these by appropriating them and transposing their secular legitimisation into the key of their own religious premises.

The second characteristic is acceptance of a plurality of religious and nonreligious worldviews, especially when they not merely differ from each other but also conflict with each other, even irreconcilably. This characteristic is based on an epistemological concept that Rawls (2005, 54–58) calls the ‘burdens of judgment’. This concept holds that, since truth is inexhaustible, no religious or nonreligious worldview can comprehend all of it, such that any worldview is only an approximation and therefore merely contains some facets of truth. It follows from this that all citizens have a right to raise their worldview for discussion in the public forum, including its metaphysical and/or religious aspects, because otherwise potentially important insights may be lost. It is all the more important because, as Habermas (2005, 137) points out, religious communities have a special capacity to articulate moral intuitions. The example Habermas (2001, 29–31) cites is the concept of humans as images of God, implying that he created and destined them for freedom, which calls for vigilance when, via gene technology, people deprive others of their freedom by forming them in their own image. Hence the notion that all citizens – including religious ones – have a right to bring their worldview up for discussion is based not merely on the principle of their individual freedom, nor purely on its importance to society, requiring a ‘free market’ for the exchange of views, but also and especially on the epistemological notion that truth is perspectival and confined to aspects. No worldview encompasses reality or totally corresponds with it, as full-blown realism professes, but each approaches it from diverse angles, illuminating some aspects and leaving others unexposed. This is a result of the spatiotemporal finitude of human life, whose conditions are rooted in contingency.

The third characteristic concerns Rawls’s accompanying proviso. I mention it here as one of the three characteristics, but in fact it has been the most hotly debated topic since the beginning of the 21st century. This is the claim that when religious and nonreligious worldviews are debated in the public arena they must at some point, in due course, be translated into the language of public reason. Rawls (2005, 462) deliberately leaves the question of the moment at which such translation should occur, hence what the ‘due’ in ‘in due course’ means, open. He also leaves the matter of who should undertake the translation open – members of the religious or nonreligious communities concerned, with or without the assistance of other communities and/or secularists as Habermas (2005, 125–141) proposes? That has to be decided in practice, Rawls says. Some regard this as decisional poverty (Maffetone 2010, 297–288).

Anyway the translation of worldviews into the language of public reason does not simply entail the application of democratic principles, as it were blindly without regard to their historical and current significance. Because the translation is aimed at reasonable understandability and acceptability, it is essential to make the principles hermeneutically accessible (Wils 2010), also, I add, in light of jurisprudence. When it comes to understandability and acceptability, if the translation is hermeneutically sound, it could be that people who do not accept a particular worldview but do understand it may still find its political implications reasonably acceptable. This entails a distinction between actual acceptance of a worldview and its reasonable acceptability. The latter is sufficient for social stability. Reasonable acceptability means that outsiders are able to understand the grounds advanced by adherents of that worldview and its translation into politics without actually appropriating it themselves.

Here the distinction between public and secular reason is crucial. The latter concerns worldviews explicitly based on nonreligious or anti-religious premises and their explicit ramifications and specifications in specific convictions. Secular reason is not the same as public reason, since, being based on the aforementioned democratic principles, it affords access to the public arena for both religious and nonreligious worldviews and not only for nonreligious ones, as secular reason does. Public reason provides a translation of religious and nonreligious beliefs into the language of the democratic principles I mentioned before: freedom and equality, explicated as freedoms and rights, plus opportunities to realise these; the rule of law; and the majority principle. That is important, because if religious beliefs and/or nonreligious views were to confine themselves to their own premises and fail to translate these into public reason, democratic politics would be obliged
to take these religious or nonreligious premises as the basis of its legislative, executive and judicial tasks. That would mean that citizens who do not adhere to those beliefs and premises or who reject them outright will be cut out, which is counter to the democratic legal order.

**Common ground in political debate and the separation of church and state**

Does finding common ground in political debate conflict with the separation of church and state or, more broadly, of religion and state or, even more broadly, of worldview and state? This separation can assume diverse forms (Durham 1996; Bader 2007, 47, 63). In Europe there are, by and large, two basic forms. The first is a democratic state that accommodates religious and nonreligious worldviews equally, for instance in regard to the religious calendar and maintenance of religious buildings, and equal exemption, such as relief or exemption from fiscal obligations. The second is democratic states that entrench laicism in their constitutions, the prime example being France. While that has been a major political factor since 1905, the French state also provides numerous accommodations and exemptions, although it may not always go as far as many other European countries, with the exception of, for instance, the maintenance of cathedrals, basilicas and large, prestigious churches. Legally the laicism of the French state means that the position of the Catholic Church and other Christian churches and religions has been removed from the sphere of public law and they are now treated as legal persons under private law, as has also happened in many other countries (Poulat 2003). Of course, this is not the case in countries with a state church, such as Greece, England, Scotland, Norway, Denmark, Malta and Finland (which has two state churches – Lutheran and Eastern Orthodox), but these countries also recognise pluralism of religious and nonreligious worldviews and equality of religions, which also applies to countries, notably Germany and Austria, where churches and religions are public law entities (Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts) falling under public law (Van der Ven 2010a, 325–327). In all these cases, equality of religious and nonreligious worldviews is the decisive criterion of the separation of church and state. If the state were to be compelled to commit itself exclusively to a particular religious or nonreligious worldview, exclusive of another/others, it would strike at the roots of the democratic state. That is why the third characteristic is so important, namely Rawls’ proviso that religious and nonreligious convictions have to be translated in due course into democratic principles: freedom and equality, explicated as freedoms and rights, plus opportunities to realise these; the rule of law; and the majority principle.

In our post-feudal era equal treatment of religious and nonreligious worldviews in the separation of church and state is embedded in the more general separation between society and the state. The state is not a society-state anymore as it was in the city-state Athens, but a separate institution or a separate collection of institutions. Society on the other hand consists of a host of other institutions and associations with a host of well-nigh immeasurable interests – technological, economic, military, political, social and cultural. Religious and nonreligious institutions form part of that society. All these societal institutions have to be treated as impartially as possible by the state in reasonably understandable accordance with the public interest, the common good.

Nonetheless the separation of church and state does not mean that the state has managed optimally to mete out equal treatment to institutions with religious and nonreligious worldviews. In many Western countries the Catholic Church and the Protestant churches are still more present in the pores of the legislative, administrative and judicial state systems than is considered fair by agnostic and atheistic communities. The same applies to the position of the Islamic communities in African and Asian countries. The great majority of these religious institutions have still not officially accepted the separation of church and state. This is mirrored in the data of the cross-national program Human Rights and Religion among a select sample of higher secondary school students in 14 countries, three African countries (Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania), three Asian countries (India, Indonesia, the Philippines), seven European countries (Belgium, England and Wales, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Turkey) and one Latin American country (Surinam). The data refer to, among other things, state autonomy in fundamental moral issues, like euthanasia and abortion, which is to say that politicians should take decision independently of religious leaders, albeit without excluding asking or receiving their advice. These data show that the means of increasing agreement
on a five-point scale vary from 3.1 to 3.3 among Catholic, Protestant and Muslim students and from 3.6 to 3.7 among nonreligious students. The differences between the first three groups and the fourth one are statistically significant (see table). This might be considered an indication that the supporters of the separation of church and state are not Catholics, Protestants or Muslims, but nonreligious people.

Table: Means of attitudes towards the separation of church and state among senior high schools students in 14 countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Catholics</th>
<th>Protestants</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Nonreligious</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Means</td>
<td>s.d.</td>
<td>Means</td>
<td>s.d.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In regard to euthanasia politicians should decide irrespective of any religious leaders’ will.</td>
<td>N=1537</td>
<td>3.3&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>N=654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In regard to abortion politicians should take decisions independently of religious leaders.</td>
<td>N=1531</td>
<td>3.1&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>N=652</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Range of scale: 1 (‘I totally disagree’) – 5 (‘I fully agree’). Distinctive indices (<sup>a</sup>, <sup>b</sup>, <sup>c</sup>), added to the means, indicate statistically significant differences within the rows. <sup>8</sup> eta p < .05; Games-Howell test p < .05. Van der Ven 2010a, 399–411.

Translation of religious and nonreligious world-views into the language of public reason, which is mandatory in the separation of church and state, is important not only for the state but also for society, for it can only function on the basis of cooperation and, even more essentially, reciprocity. Rawls consistently underscores reciprocity (Rawls 2005, xliii, 48–54, 441–445). The dialogue required for this is not feasible without such translation (Ferrara 2010).

Religious objections

But is it justified to require religions to translate their tenets into the language of public reason? There are three objections: the first is religious, the second concerns the concept of truth, and the third is moral and political.

The religious objection is the question of whether faith in God or gods is in fact reconcilable with (public) reason. Is it appropriate to explore and test the reasonable weight of religions before the forum of public reason? Is there not a specifically religious reason apart from public reason, to which it cannot and may not be reduced? The so-called axial religions, which include the major religions, have all manner of political ideas, but because of the orienta-

tion to the transcendent, the divine, they cannot be reduced to these (Eisenstadt 1986; 2003; Arnason et al. 2005).<sup>8</sup> And in the event of conflict between religious and political reason, does not the former have priority over the latter? The question falls beyond the scope of this article, but that is not too serious, for one can formulate just one epistemological rule that mitigates the objection and reduces it to manageable proportions.

The epistemological rule is that the reasonableness of religion is a matter of practical rather than of theoretical reason. Religion is not a comprehensive doctrine, as Rawls (2005, 59) would have it, but a commitment, a concern for people’s existential practice, more particularly their spiritual and moral practice, with a vertical dimension – an orientation to God or gods – and a horizontal dimension, an orientation towards fellow humans, especially those in distress. In spiritual life cognition, emotion and volition converge, naturally in varying degrees. Hence it is not a matter of whether God or the gods exist, or what divine revelation is if it has occurred, but of a reasonable account of religious practice, hence testing the prudential arguments in support of such prac-

<sup>8</sup> The axial religions date back to the 5th century BCE, with roots in the 8th century BCE and offshoots in the 3rd century BCE. Because of their Judaic roots Christianity and Islam are considered axial religions, albeit as a secondary manifestation of these. The term ‘axial religions’ is intended to distinguish them from pre-axial religions, formerly known as ‘primitive religions’, because they came to be considered the axis of the history of religions on account of their supra-local expansion, religious abstraction, conceptualisation, institutionalisation and politi
cisation.
Religion’s Political Role in a Rawlsian Key

tice (Walgrave 1962; Ferrara 2008). Religious practice is primary, a reasonable account is secondary; after this comes a comprehensive reasonable account and finally comprehensive doctrine arrives. Thus a religion’s claim to uniqueness, for instance, may be examined reasonably to determine its implications for daily life, more particularly for daily life in the state and society (Pannenberg 1971, 629–633). This reasonable testing forms part of religion’s dynamics and their transformative and self-reflective capacity.

The second objection pertains to the concept of truth, which I have touched on already. Rawls’ theory concerning the burden of judgment has to do with perspectives and aspects. But the truth concept of the mainline religions is not simply one of truth, so the objection goes, but that of the truth, in the singular and not in the plural, in some instances ‘the whole truth’ or ‘the full truth’, ‘the revealed truth’. By juxtaposing religious and nonreligious worldviews in public debate, without subordinating one to the other, the truth becomes a partial truth on a par with other partial truths, and orthodoxy is put on a par with other orthodoxies, thus obliterating the distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy and, in fact, the very meaning of orthodoxy (Locke 1991, 80–85).

This may be true, but it does not alter the fact that in the public debate the religions concerned should in no way be prevented from presenting their truth as the truth. The same applies to adherents of nonreligious, atheist or anti-theistic worldviews – in principle these are, or could be, equally convinced of the fullness of their truth. That is in fact what the public debate is about: which truth claim can hold water, and to what extent, in the forum of reason, in this case public reason. One condition is that representatives of religions and nonreligious worldviews should be prepared to have dialogue in the forum of public reason. If they are not – and that happens in both religious and nonreligious fundamentalism – there is no scope for democratic dialogue, or even for democracy. Then dialogue becomes an exchange of information or a reciprocal attempt at conversion. It cannot but raise doubt about whether democracy is being accepted for the rights reasons, as Rawls puts it, or merely as a modus vivendi, for one’s own (religious) profit. That is and remains the key question.

In mitigation one could add – perhaps over optimistically, one might say, following Rawls (2005,170) – that the same mainline religions, apart from their fundamentalist wings, are able to recognize mutual similarities and accept reciprocal additions. In other words, alongside or instead of a purely exclusive orientation they also display inclusive orientations depending on the relative prominence or marginality of the issues concerned. Thus the Christian tradition – both Catholic and Protestant – recognizes a hierarchy of truths (hierarchia veritatum), comprising a scale of the centrality or marginality of the truths they adhere to. This is evidenced by the much maligned Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of the Catholic Church, Dominus Jesus (2000), by then cardinal Ratzinger, now pope Benedict XVI. This document may be characterized as predominantly exclusive, even though some inclusive aspects are discernible. The accent on exclusiveness is evident in the emphasis on God’s universal and complete revelation in Jesus Christ, which precludes any approach that regards this revelation as limited or even complementary to revelations in other religions (nos. 6 and 15). At the same time some paragraphs evince some inclusiveness by mentioning positive elements and intermediary participations (mediationes participatae) of this revelation in other religions (nos. 8 and 14). The declaration moreover specifies that interreligious dialogue should be conducted in freedom and on an equal footing (no. 22) (Van der Ven 2010a, 72–73).

As we have said, this is a mitigation, but one arising from the psycho-social makeup of human beings, not a smoothing over. It is the typically human capacity, developed at an early age, to transpose oneself to someone else’s position and stand in his shoes. It gives one access to the mental and experiential world of others, and enables one to participate in it and become aware of both differences and similarities (Cacioppo & Patrick 2009). The absolute antithesis of insiders and outsiders is fallacious (Jensen 2011). People are not absolutely impermeable to one another, neither are religions. The many forms of (unwitting) historical and present-day syncretism are evidence of this, as noted above with reference to the example of the Lucan story about Paul’s speech to the Areopagus.

The third objection is moral and political. It implies that the moral and political implications manifesting in religious practice are narrowed down to individual rights and freedoms, hence to deontological rules that are considered universally valid but are
not associated with any real-life practice or context whatsoever. But religion does not comprise only deontological rules. They are no more than a residue of the broad, dense and deep forms of religious life embedded in teleological orientations, in which moral ideals, values and virtues play a key role, functioning in particular contexts of particular spatiotemporal communities, where they also display marked differences (Reder 2008). The aforementioned translation into individual rights and freedoms reduces the teleological richness of religious traditions and communities to abstract, deontological concepts.

A possible solution could be to combine the two moral approaches according to the triad proposed by Ricoeur (1992a, 169–296). He prioritises teleological orientations like the ideals, values and virtues of traditions and communities. He then applies the deontological rules, the cardinal ones being autonomy, respect and justice. He uses these as a critical corrective to test and ‘filter’ the teleological ideals, values and virtues. The aim is to determine whether these deontological rules are trampled underfoot in teleological action patterns and customs such as historical, folk, particular morals that lead to oppression of women, homosexuals, other religions and — even more perverse — blood revenge, extrajudicial execution or genocide. In the process teleological action patterns that conflict with autonomy are filtered out, along with ways of dealing with people suffering from disrespect and violating their rights. Finally Ricoeur advocates applying the teleological orientations, purged by deontological rules, in — not to — real-life situations according to classical prudencia.

All this was an attempt to identify common ground where religion and politics can meet: a political common ground. Of course, this common ground differs fundamentally from the common ground Paul used according to the Lucan account of his speech to the Areopagus. His was the common ground of Hellenistic religious culture and philosophy, in conjunction with those of the Judaeo-Hellenistic diaspora in Asia Minor. The common ground in our time, I have argued, is that of a democratic legal culture. Naturally that culture is not (as a matter of course) part of religions with their age-old traditions, and one can cite numerous historical and present-day situations that reveal antagonism between the two. I have, however, refuted some major objections that religions may have against a democratic legal order. I have tried to formally bridge the differences between the Lucan story of 20 centuries ago and our own day and age: the formal resemblance lies in looking for and embarking on common ground as a pre-eminent hermeneutic challenge.

**Deliberative rhetoric**

In addition to common ground I propose, as indicated above, to look at another feature of the Lucan account of Paul’s address to the Areopagus: the use of deliberative rhetoric.

To understand the nature of deliberative rhetoric it is useful to place it in the broad field of rhetoric as outlined by Aristotle (1358b36–1359a29). Rhetoric may be subdivided into two kinds: one that centres on practical reason, and one that does not. The first kind has two subgroups: deliberative rhetoric, used by politicians and citizens with a view to democracy, and forensic rhetoric, used by prosecutors, judges and advocates in law courts. Non-argumentative rhetoric, known as epideictic rhetoric, seeks to thank and praise someone in display oratory.

Deliberative rhetoric applies practical rather than theoretical reason (Aristotle 1138a18–1145b14). Freely following Habermas (1982), theoretical reason has to do with observing the (physical, social and psychological) structure of the world and the extent to which interventions in that world are effective. Practical reason is about how we should act in the world, according to which norms and for what reasons. The latter refer to the grounds of the norms and values and the justification for our conduct. Parallel to that are theoretical and practical arguments (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1982, 125), and theoretical and practical syllogisms. Among the latter the maior is normative, the minor descriptive and the conclusio normative once more (Hare 1967; Brennenstuhl 1980; Van IJzendoorn 1980).

Hermeneutically inspired by the Lucan Paul, I list some pertinent features of deliberative rhetoric in public debate, not as in Paul’s case in a thoroughly religious context (“Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way”, Ac 17:22), but in the pluralistic, secularised context of present-day North-Western Europe. The first feature concerns the principle of argumentation in deliberative rhetoric, the second concerns its practical implementa-
tion, and third the relevance of appraisal and compromise.

**Argumentation in deliberative rhetoric**

The first feature of deliberative rhetoric in my sense is the following. Suppose that at some point in the public debate a transition was made, in due course, from a religious language game to a political one and religious beliefs have been translated into the language of public reason. Then it would be wrong to adduce religious ‘arguments’ for political viewpoints with reference to God’s revelation or his will. These are not accessible to people of other religious or nonreligious worldviews, hence contrary to the principle of reciprocity, which Rawls, as noted already, considered extremely important. Such arguments are and cannot be reasonably acceptable to their minds. For public reason in a democracy there is no such thing as the truth, neither is there a ‘revealed’ truth: all religious and nonreligious beliefs are equally free (religious freedom) and equal before the law (separation of church and state). Once the aforementioned translation has been made ‘in due course’, what is at issue is not ‘revealed truth’ but a translation into the language of ‘public truth’, not ‘divine reason’ but its translation into the language of ‘public reason’.

In concrete terms, once the transition from a religious language game to a public language game has been made, a statement like ‘official legitimisation of euthanasia is not permitted under any circumstances, because it is counter to God’s will’ is out of order. It is out of order, because it is tautological. After all, it says the same thing twice: we are not free, because we are not free (being subject to God) (cf. Schüller 1970; 1973, 182–198; Kuitert 1985, 96). Such statements are also substantively out of order, because God’s will falls outside the public language game. Nonreligious participants in public debate do not understand the statement, even supposing that (all) religious people do.

Yet some differentiation is called for, because God’s will can be interpreted in two ways. Hugo Grotius (1625, I,1,15) posits out that an act may be good or evil because it is so according to God’s will (justum esse, id est jure debitum, quia Deus voluit), or because God does not will the act on account of its intrinsic nature, hence it is evil according to reason (ideo id Deum velle quia justum est). In the first case divine voluntarism dominates and one ends up with the foregoing tautology; in the second human reason dominates and is challenged to find human reasons for the goodness or evil of the act. In the first case ‘God’s will’ still has to be translated in due course, the second already focuses on the translation.

This does not mean that revealed truth and religious reason are not significant factors in the debate. They are highly significant, because they can motivate and inspire debate. Once it has been decided to translate religious reason into public reason, religion no longer plays a role in an argumentative sense, but it remains a maieutic factor. It may serve as a motivating impulse to activate public reason, may furnish inspiring metaphors and myths and present rituals, thus tempering the harshness of public reason, warming its coldness, bending its rigidity, melting its cynicism – in fact, taking account of human standards, as Habermas (2005, 216–257) interprets Kant.

**Deliberative argumentation in practice: exchange of perspectives**

After having clarified the first feature of deliberative rhetoric, i.e. its argumentative nature, below I elaborate on its second feature, its practical implementation. After all, the transition from religious to public reason is not once and for all, as though it were a linear process. On the contrary, it is an iterative process, in which the linguistic border between religion and politics is overstepped over and over again from both sides, from religious to political reason and vice versa. Because this easily causes confusion it is important that the distinctiveness of the two languages – religious and public – be kept in mind constantly. To this end mutual exchange of perspectives between the two sets of participants in the discourse is important: religious participants socialised and trained in an age-old religious tradition, and those who were not and are probably more at home with public reason. In an exchange of perspectives the latter may help the former to shift from the religious language game to the public one, and the former may augment, differentiate and even correct the public language (Habermas 2005, 125–141).

An exchange of perspectives in public discourse focusing on deliberative rhetoric is facilitated by applying a few simple logical rules to avoid or clarify misunderstanding. These are: (1) contributions to the debate made with a view to reasonable accounts of religious practices are to be regarded as statements, no matter how emotional and subjective they
may be; (2) such statements are subject to the criterion of intersubjective monitoring; (3) they should be distinct from arguments in support of such statements; (4) arguments should be historical, empirical and systematic – references to authoritative traditions and persons are allowed, but do not qualify as arguments; (5) arguments adduced to counter pro arguments and weighed against them enhance the reasonableness of the statements (Schellens & Verhoeven 1994; Hoeken et al. 2008, 148); (6) statements should be free from contradictions; (7) terms should be consistent, unless it is indicated that they are given a different meaning in other contexts; (8) statements, substantiated by solid arguments, culminate in valid conclusions (cf. Pannenberg 1973, 270–273, 275–277).

Of course, these rules are not to be found in the Lucan Paul’s address to the Areopagus. They apply to public discourse in societies characterised by modern differentiation and rationalisation (Weber 1980; Schluchter 1979). However, at a higher level of abstraction – counter to the view of the historian Kennedy (1980, 130) – the account of Paul’s address certainly has an argumentative structure. If one re-reads that narrative, one cannot but discern a concatenation of arguments, based on the religious common ground with the elite of the time – arguments addressed to them, like ‘you also oppose temple rituals’, ‘you also reject the idea that God lives in temples’, ‘you also deny that he is made by human hands’, ‘you also maintain that he is close to you and you to him’, ‘you also aver that we are a single human race’. While Paul undoubtedly argues in terms of a thoroughly religious context, what is important from our point of view is that he does so in terms of common ground. The common ground nowadays is no longer religious but political, as I argued following Rawls, but an argumentative structure is still required, this time a political argumentative structure.

To demonstrate the relevance of the foregoing logical rules I cite some examples of the performance of religious representatives in public discourse when they fail to make the transition from religious to public reason. That happens when, having entered the public arena, they adopt a religious perspective and confine themselves to a claim that they regard as conclusive: ‘I represent the doctrine of the Catholic Church and therefore euthanasia is intrinsically evil’ or ‘therefore homosexual practices are unnatural’. This puts an end to discourse before it gets started and leaves the listeners perplexed, since there is no scope for reasonable reciprocity based on common ground. While the conjunctive ‘therefore’ may be conclusive to Catholics, to people from other backgrounds who participate in public discourse on the basis of public reason it is not. The same may be said of statements backed up by biblical texts that God is the Lord of life and death, and therefore abortion is always murder, no matter what the intention or circumstances may be. Again the conjunctive ‘therefore’ may be conclusive to Catholics, but not to people of other worldviews who join in public discourse on the basis of public reason – quite apart from the fact that in some acknowledged historical traditions in the Catholic Church a distinction is made between life, human life and the human person (Curran 1982). In such cases little remains for participants but to stare at each other blankly, since there is no mutual exchange of perspectives.

If, as happens in these examples, an exclusively religious perspective is adopted without (valid) arguments in terms of public reason, there is little or no chance that religious statements will convince anybody. My own empirical research in the Netherlands on euthanasia has shown that purely religious notions for or against it have no real influence either on nonreligious students’ attitudes towards it, or on those of students who define themselves as Muslim or Christian. Euthanasia has been de-sacralised almost entirely (Van der Ven 2010b, 2–3–207, 222). Unilateral adherence to religious arguments and disregard of public ones pushes it ever deeper down the negative spiral of de-sacralisation.

By contrast there are instances where reasonable reciprocity works. Rawls cites the prophets in the narratives of the Jewish Bible, the parable of the Good Samaritan in the New Testament, the rhetoric of religious leaders in the struggle for the abolition of slavery, and the ministry of the Reverend Martin Luther King in the civil rights movement. He also points out that they play two language games – a religious and a political one. They were ‘bilingual’ (Rawls 2005, 249–250, 464–465). President Barack Obama expressed it eloquently in his The Audacity of Hope: “Surely, secularists are wrong when they ask believers to leave their religion at the door before entering the public square (…). What deliberative, pluralistic democracy does demand is that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into
universal, rather than religious-specific values. (…) If I want others to listen to me, then I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all” (Obama 2006, 218–219). Another example that Rawls cites approvingly is the way the then cardinal Bernadin of Chicago expressed his view on abortion – the content of which Rawls personally repudiates (Rawls 2005., 243–244, n.32) – in nonreligious terms, namely public peace, essential protections of human rights (i.e. allegedly the right to life) and commonly accepted standards of moral behaviour in a community of law (Rawls 2005, liv, n. 32, 480, n.82). A final example is the public debate on legislation on euthanasia in the Netherlands that was conducted in the full public limelight over the last 30 years. In that debate the report of the government appointed commission on euthanasia (1985) was directive. The commission comprised members who, under stringent conditions, considered euthanasia justified – albeit not permitted, implying that it was not a right – as well as members that absolutely rejected it. The latter included some representatives of Christian churches. In the course of the proceedings they had and grabbed every opportunity to expound their religious objections, also against a strictly stipulated legal regulation, and to discuss the other members’ arguments, both religious and purely ethical, with them. What is significant is that the Christian compilers of the minority report, which was appended to that of the government commission, were commended for translating their arguments about such a religiously charged subject into nonreligious terms with a view to public mutual understanding (Weyers 2002, 185).

Appraisal and compromise

The Lucan Paul likewise set his sights on mutual reasonable acceptability. Viewed from the angle of the story of his speech in Athens, the entire text is marked by an exchange of perspectives. Those who, like Paul, seek common ground with their audience automatically adopt their dialogue partners’ perspective along with their own. Without an exchange of perspectives there can be no common ground.

Whereas the first attribute of deliberative rhetoric in our sense is that of mandatory argumentation and the second is the consistent need to exchange perspectives, the third and final characteristic is the following. Sometimes, at the end of a discourse, statements, arguments and conclusions arising from the religious language game and those of the public language game remain diametrically opposed, there is no trace of rapprochement and the conclusion is an agreement to disagree. In other cases a deliberative appraisal is reached (libra means pair of scales). Such appraisal may result in compromise. In 2009 the Catholic Church compromised on abortion in the case of a Brazilian girl, Carmen, who, having been regularly raped by her stepfather, was pregnant with twins at a very tender age while living in appalling medical and psycho-social circumstances. However, after some internal deliberation the Vatican turned down the compromise (2009, March 23, July 3 and 10, www.chiesa.espressonlite.it).

Yet compromises are not unknown in religions. Official religious documents, declarations and decisions are not achieved without compromises. This also applies to the Catholic Church, evidenced by Vatican II’s dogmatic constitution of the church, Lumen Gentium, in which a hierarchical and a democratic view on the church are situated in a kind of seemingly unobserved coexistence. This type of compromised dogmatic pronouncement is also apparent in ecumenical documents such as the 1994 christological declaration by the Catholic and Syriac Orthodox Churches (Déclaration christologique commune entre l’Église catholique et l’Église assyrienne de l’Orient), in which centuries-old, competing dogmatic titles of Maria are compromised, Maria the mother of Jesus and Maria the mother of God (Teule 2008, 103–106). Another example, now in the field of politico-ethical issues, is Vatican II’s declaration on religious freedom, Dignitatis Humanae (1965), in which all humans are said to have the right to enjoy religious freedom, except for Catholics as they are to obey the church (Van der Ven 2010a, 213–215). Compromises may be considered adequate when religious insights are translated, in due course, into the language of public reason – naturally within the hermeneutic ambit of the identity of the religions concerned.

There are two arguments in favour of such compromises. The first is that in the domain of practical reason there is no question of absolute certainty because of the contingency of practice, the actions which leave their effects and side effects more or less in the dark, certainly in the long run; moreover, these actions cannot be reversed. The same contingency accounts for the spatiotemporal confinement
of decisions to act: a decision applies here and now but is naturally not applicable everywhere and for all time. Practical reason never gets beyond deliberative appraisal of arguments for and against some or other variant action. The knowledge it provides is that of estimated probability. When new facts are presented or new ideas evolve there is a need for reappraisal and the decision may turn out differently. In other words, practical reason does not get away from essential fallibility, based as it is on estimate and appraisal. The knowledge it provides is that of estimated probability. When new facts are presented or new ideas evolve there is a need for reappraisal and the decision may turn out differently. In other words, practical reason does not get away from essential fallibility, based as it is on estimate and appraisal. The judgment it contains is reflective (Kant 1951; Ferrara 2008), a judgment based on prudential rather than logical conclusions (Ricoeur 1992a, 297–356; 1995, 185–192; 2000, 413–436). This also applies to practical reason aimed at reasonable accounts of religious practices (Walgrave 1962).

The second argument is that democracy is fundamentally based on acceptance of a plurality of religious and nonreligious worldviews. This requires recognition of reasonably acceptable views of both the majority and minorities. Such recognition is expressed in willingness to compromise. Compromise means that participants in the discourse are not enemies but opponents, whose reasonably acceptable views merit respect because of their human dignity (Ricoeur 2005, 206–216). This is particularly relevant when the debate does not hinge on diametrically opposite ideas about good and evil, let alone absolute good and evil, but, as commonly happens, on notions concerning a mix of good and evil, of second best or the lesser evil (minus malum). Clearly the latter does not happen in cases of rotten compromises when a minority group is humiliated by the majority (Margalit 2010).

Paul made no rotten compromise in his address to the Stoics and Epicureans; his compromise is reasonable and substantiated. For throughout his speech we are struck by the fact that, whilst dealing with faith in God and in passing with creation, he does not mention other major Christian themes, such as alienation and sin, forgiveness, redemption and the eschaton. Even the person of Jesus the Christ – the very core and centre of the Christian faith – is glossed over in the conclusion to the speech. Paul does not mention him by name but refers to him as ‘a man’ – as anonymous as you can get – appointed to judge humankind. The compromise is reasonable, because by calling him ‘a man’ he wants to avoid the impression that he was introducing foreign gods, as I indicated earlier (Pesch 1986, 140).

Conclusion

Guided by a hermeneutic analysis of the story of Paul’s address to the Areopagus, I have outlined some conditions for the actions of religious representatives in the public sphere. Paramount is, firstly, the establishment of common ground with participants in the discourse. Without it, we learn from Luke’s account of Paul’s performance, the credibility of religion suffers. In present-day North-Western Europe the common ground is no longer religious or philosophical but, I have argued, political. This requires religious representatives to play two language games: the religious one and, in due course, the political one. The second key requirement is competence in deliberative rhetoric, which is intent on persuading other participants of the credibility of religion, not by using (religious) authoritative arguments that, from a logical point of view, are not arguments at all or by playing on their emotions, but by providing valid reasons for it. Deliberative democracy calls for a capacity for deliberative argumentation, including the ability to exchange perspectives and arrive at reasonable compromises.

In other words, whereas Rawls advocates acceptance of liberal democracy by religions and requires them to adduce intrinsic reasons for doing so, this article tries to show that part of these premises, at least as far as Christianity is concerned, is the inter-contextual hermeneutics that is a hallmark of Luke’s account of Paul’s speech to the Areopagus. Such an inter-contextual hermeneutics is, both historically and systematically, the mainspring of religious dynamics, critical self-reflection and transformation.

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