REACHING TOWARD DEMOCRACY:
THEOLOGY AND THEORY
WHEN TALK TURNS TO WAR

As I was writing this introduction in February of this year, President George W. Bush had just delivered his State of the Union Address and clouds of war were gathering over Iraq. U.N. weapons inspectors were submitting their reports on the progress of Iraq's efforts to disarm and Security Council members, led by France and Germany, were struggling to keep war at bay, allowing inspections and negotiations more time to continue. Antiwar protesters were gathering by the hundreds of thousands in the world's major cities and North American media commentators informed us, at times with some surprise, at times with some dismay, that public opinion against war was massive, diversely represented and thoughtfully articulated both in North America and abroad.

Since then, world events have taken their course. We have seen the launch of the war and are now watching its dangerous aftermath unfold before us. Yet the public discourse evaluating the wisdom of the war continues, both within the chambers of official decision making and in the wider public spaces where citizens' voices are heard. It is this continued discourse, as much as the events themselves, that will set the standards by which future events will be measured. So our participation in this discourse is crucial. Still, many of us remain uncertain about what we should say, how we should we think. Whatever convictions we hold, we feel some uncertainty in the face of events and I want to suggest a reason for this.

I want to say that world events are slowly revealing that decision making on issues like Iraq must now be democratic in a form and on a scale that we have not seen before. We do not know what this means, nor do we know what it requires of our leaders or of us. We have gotten used to some measure of democracy in individual nations, but we are not sure what it looks like on a world scale. We are not exactly sure if we have the real thing at home. More than this, we are not sure whether we should dare hope for it.

Over the past decade, we have watched commentators like Francis Fukuyama pronounce "The End of History" and the global triumph of liberal democracy.[1] These were the heady days after the fall of the Soviet Union and

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[1]Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992). See the reference to Fukuyama in Seyla Benhabib, "Introduction: The Democratic Moment and the Problem of Difference," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton NJ: Princeton

things were looking up for the West and the free market. But they were soon followed by the proliferation of devastating ethnic conflicts like those in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The ensuing era of instability led authors like Robert Kaplan to ask whether democracy was such a good idea after all.[2] In times of violence and bloodshed, if stability can be secured without democracy, then perhaps it might not always be the right thing.

And, as if this were not enough, the events of September 11th left us with a feeling of vulnerability that threatens our very commitment to democracy. The measures invoked for ensuring "homeland security" have led analysts like Reg Whitaker to suggest that we have already begun trading democracy for security.[3] As commentators and world leaders warn us to prepare for continuing terrorist reprisals in the wake of Iraq, we cannot help but wonder whether we have seriously misjudged the commitment it entails. We have become cautious about making optimistic pronouncements in the name of democracy, we have become suspicious about its possibilities on a world scale, and we have begun to wonder if we are willing to pay its price. And now we have fought another war in the name of democracy.

Despite all this, I want to suggest that we are, indeed, witnessing the slow and difficult emergence of world democracy and this remains something to celebrate. Through the entire course of events around Iraq, there has been little serious doubt whether the world community should gather collectively to act in response to Saddam Hussein's reign of violence. The debate has been around what should be done and how it should be decided. The push towards unilateral military action by the U.S. and Britain has been justified in part as a critique of past U.N. efforts to mobilize effectively on behalf of citizens in the name of justice. This has been interpreted by some as a rejection of the principle of democracy. Yet, I would argue that the time and effort spent trying to secure the support of the U.N. Security Council suggest otherwise. More than this, the ongoing public debates over the role of the U.N. and the Iraqi people in the

University Press, 1996) 3-4. See also the analysis of R. Bruce Douglass in "Liberalism after the Good Times: The 'End of History' in Historical Perspective," in *Catholicism and Liberalism: Contributions to American Public Philosophy*, ed. R. Bruce Douglass and David Hollenbach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 100-24.

[2]Robert D. Kaplan, "Was Democracy Just a Moment?" *The Atlantic Monthly* 280 (December 1997): 55ff.

[3]Reginald Whitaker, "The Return of Big Brother? Privacy, Surveillance Technologies, and Ethics after 9/11," public lecture cosponsored by the Ethics Centre and the Glasmacher Lectures of Saint Paul University, Ottawa, 14 March 2003; text available online at <http://web.ustpaul.uottawa.ca/fr/recherche/centre_ethique/Whitaker.htm>. See also his book, *The End of Privacy: How Total Surveillance Is Becoming a Reality* (New York: New Press / W. W. Norton, 1999).

rebuilding process bear witness to the moral force exerted by the principle of democracy worldwide.

More than any previous war, this has been a battle for the minds and hearts of citizens. There is a growing sense that, with new media technologies, political leaders face a heightened accountability to citizens both within and beyond their national borders. Moreover, there remains a prevailing conviction that any initiative launched without the support of the world community as articulated through the United Nations will have difficulty gaining legitimacy. With Iraq, the will of the Security Council may have gone unheeded. Yet, I would argue that in spite of this, or perhaps because of it, the moral force of the democratic principle of fully participatory decision making on a world scale remains as strong as it has ever been.

If there is any truth to what I am suggesting, then we are indeed witnessing the slow and painful birthing of world democracy. The child born of this process will, no doubt, be fragile and easily harmed. She will be slow in developing and as she grows she will be awkward, poorly coordinated, marginally effective in her actions. At each step along the way, her learning will follow the perilous path of trial and error. If the events of September 11th and Iraq are any indication, living under her care will be dangerous, fraught with risks and threats against which we will have little protection.

At every turn, as we come to understand more fully what democracy entails, we will be confronted with the demands it makes on us. If it means anything, it is that in some way decision making in social and political life must be the decision making of citizens. But good decisions require learning and quite often this means the hard learning of those difficult life encounters that must transform our horizons of thinking and caring about the world.[4] This is risky business and it is painful business. What we face now is the challenge of engaging in this collaborative project of learning with the citizens of the world.

I want to suggest that this learning must begin with a learning about democracy itself. Thinking about democracy naturally leads to questions about institutions. But debates around institutions are premised on more basic expectations about what they serve and how they are sustained. So there arise the questions that relate more directly to our "Vocation as Theologians." What is democracy, what sort of creature has been born in our midst and how is it related to our destiny as persons before God? If we are to nurture it, we must know something about what it is, how it is structured, how it grows, how it can fall ill, what observable signs mark its development and what indicators signal that it has gone astray. These are not simply questions about institutions that we construct,

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[4]For a discussion of the role of citizens' ongoing learning in a democracy see Kenneth R. Melchin, "What Is a Democracy Anyway? A Discussion between Lonergan and Rawls," in *Lonergan Workshop*, vol. 15, ed. Fred Lawrence (Chestnut Hill MA: Boston College, 1999) 99-116.

they are questions about what Lonergan would understand as emergent structures of meaning; patterns of meaningful cooperation among persons that emerge with an inner logic and dynamism that call forth our efforts to understand.[5] They carry with them ethical and theological questions about the goals of democracy, the obligations it places on its citizens, and our sense of its place in the plan of Salvation History.

This is the line of exploration I would like to follow with you today. Before I begin, however, I must declare something about myself and the place from which I speak. I am a Canadian and am painfully aware that I have entered the United States as a citizen of a foreign nation that has not supported the war of the American government. I strongly agree with my own government's position against joining a war launched without the authorization of the United Nations Security Council. I am not an absolute pacifist and have kept open the possibility that some sort of action in Iraq may, at some point, have been required and justified. The injustices and violence of Saddam's regime, however, are not isolated incidents. As this century unfolds, we will be called time and again to intervene on behalf of world citizens. In my judgement, the central ethical challenge in these events is building and strengthening robust foundations for multilateral action in the name of justice. For all of its weaknesses and failures, the United Nations is the forum that we have deemed legitimate for doing this multilateral work. Whatever we might think about the U.N., this is no time to be circumventing or undermining its development.

Opportunities for rebuilding international trust continue to arise with the reconstruction of Iraq and they will arise time and again as the challenges of justice present themselves elsewhere around the world. Meeting these challenges will require courage and dedication, but it will also require some hard learning, both in its practical and theoretical modes. Much of our analysis of world events has presupposed that we have understood democracy and that the problem is one of implementation. I want to suggest otherwise. As champions of democracy, we still have a lot of work to do understanding what we have championed.

And so I invite you along on this excursion of learning. Our journey has three parts, the first taking us into the complex and tangled terrain of theory. The past decade has seen a flurry of debates about democracy and I have assembled some representative voices to suggest a direction for thinking what it might mean for us. In the second part, I offer a discussion of these theories that draws on a range of insights to support what I think might be a good direction to pursue. Finally, I want to explore some resources from our Christian faith tradition that

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[5]See Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. F. E. Crowe and R. M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997; orig. 1957) 232-39; 619-21. See also Lonergan, *Topics in Education: The Cincinnati Lectures of 1959 on the Philosophy of Education*, ed. R. M. Doran and F. E. Crowe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) 33-48.

might help us better understand and live out the challenges presented by this historical moment. So on to our journey.

LIBERAL AND DELIBERATIVE VISIONS OF DEMOCRACY

As Sheldon Wolin has observed, we commonly think of democracy as a political system, a system of government whose natural home is the nation state. Its principal goal is securing the freedom of citizens and the typical signs of freedom that we look for are free elections, free political parties, free speech and free markets.[6] The image that often comes to mind is Hobbes's portrait of an aggregate of citizens, each of us individually endowed with natural rights to freely determine our own living, but who find ourselves in a state of perpetual strife because our plans invariably conflict with those of our neighbors. The nation state enters as the answer to this problem and democracy is secured when we hand over some of our natural rights to the state who exercises them on our behalf to protect our freedom from the intrusion of others.[7]

Commentators, however, have pointed out that this image represents only one particular tradition of thinking on democracy, the liberal tradition. Philosophers like Rousseau painted a somewhat different portrait, one that illuminates the bonds among citizens and the participatory dimension of democratic life. Jürgen Habermas[8] has argued that in this alternative view, the basic state of society is conceived, not as one of perpetual conflict among individuals, but as one where we live within traditions that bind us together in communities of shared interests and values.[9] Democracy, in this view, is a more wide-ranging, participatory enterprise of citizens, not primarily an activity of the nation state. When society is democratic, the formation of the values, policies and institutions of public life goes forward with the full, free and equal participation of citizens. When conflicts do arise, they are resolved collectively by appealing to this lived tradition. The role of the state, then, is to guarantee the full, free and equal participation of all in this ongoing process of collective will formation.[10]

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[6]Sheldon S. Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference*, 42.

[7]Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Michael Oakeshott (New York: Macmillan/Collier Books, 1977; orig. 1651) chaps. 14-15. See Sheldon Wolin's discussion of Hobbes in "Fugitive Democracy," 31-33.

[8]Jürgen Habermas, "Three Normative Models of Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference*, 21-30; see also Benhabib, "Introduction," in *Democracy and Difference*, 5-6.

[9]James Bohman and William Rehg, "Introduction," in *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Reason and Politics*, ed. James Bohman and William Rehg (Cambridge MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1997) ix-xxx, in particular, x. See also Habermas, "Popular Sovereignty as Procedure," in *Deliberative Democracy*, 35-65.

[10]Habermas, "Three Normative Models," in *Democracy and Difference*, 22.

Conflicts between the basic assumptions of these different traditions are at the root of many contemporary debates on how democracy is to be understood and lived.[11] The best known spokesperson for the liberal view, John Rawls, has offered us a *Political Liberalism*[12] that acknowledges many of the insights of the alternative tradition. Aware as he is of the excessive individualism and the overly conflictual view of social life that is entrenched in the liberal view, Rawls begins by recognizing that citizens live within Comprehensive Doctrines—religious, philosophical, and moral traditions that bind us together with others in common values and shared visions of the good life. However, democracies are societies that must recognize a plurality of opposing and irreconcilable Comprehensive Doctrines. Hence, a version of the conflictual vision of society remains. So too does the tendency towards individualism. For the goal of Rawls's political liberalism is to ensure that all individuals have a maximal freedom to determine their own living that is compatible with an equal freedom for all.

Democratic freedom, for Rawls, is secured by a political arrangement whose basis is a set of public values and principles that must be recognized by all. The goal of these values and principles is not to legislate on the whole of life. Quite the contrary, in most of life, citizens must be free to work out whatever arrangements we choose. Still, managing the conflicts that arise in this environment requires rules and institutions. And these rules and institutions must be grounded in a set of ideas that cannot be derived from any one tradition or Comprehensive Doctrine. They must be freestanding, with their grounding in an exercise of public reason that expresses an overlapping consensus belonging to all but originating in none.

This public reason, for Rawls, is achieved by drawing a firm line between the public values that must be acknowledged by all and the private values that citizens will have the liberty to pursue at will. He invokes a version of Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative to determine how we will arrive at the public values. If people holding diverse and irreconcilably conflicting Doctrines want to live together and build a social life together, we must ask ourselves, first, not what each wants out of life, but what ideas we think could elicit the agreement of all.[13] The result is an overlapping consensus and the principles expressed in this consensus will establish a context for maximal liberty and will set the ideas and institutions that will regulate the conflicts that arise in living out this liberty.

Now the communitarian criticisms of Rawls are probably familiar to many of us. Authors like Michael Sandel[14] and Alasdair MacIntyre[15] have argued that

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[11]Habermas, "Three Normative Models," in *Democracy and Difference*, 22-25.

[12]John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). Rawls presents the main lines of his argument in "Lecture 1," 3-46, and he restates central key ideas in the "Introduction," xv-xxxvi, and "Introduction to the Paperback Edition," xxxvii-lxii.

[13]See Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xliv-xlvii, 51-54, 217-18, 225-26.

[14]Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy*

Rawls is naive to imagine that public reason can separate itself from and rise above the historical traditions that invariably shape the horizons of citizens. All reason is ineluctably historical and the ideal of a freestanding universal reason, drawing only on its own inner resources is an illusion. MacIntyre goes so far as to argue that this ideal of autonomous reason was the folly of the entire Enlightenment project. Reason can never escape its historical, hermeneutical contexts. Moreover, it does not need to. For Rawls's liberalism has missed the central insight of the alternative position. Life in society is not always and everywhere conflictual, it is constituted by shared identity and shared meanings. When conflicts do arise, citizens are not without means for discerning solutions. For we can turn to our shared values, our foundations of collective identity, and the historical wellsprings of our traditions and institutions for resources to mediate the disputes that arise in democracy.[16]

The problem with the communitarian vision, however, is that these resources of shared tradition frequently prove inadequate when democratic decision making involves citizens from diverse traditions.[17] Our attention to new social movements in the 1970s and 1980s brought us face to face with the challenge of diverse and conflicting identities in democracy. The rise of ethnicity in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union has reminded us of the violence that ethnic conflicts can breed. And feminists have shown us how our own authoritative traditions are frequently tainted by the poison of patriarchy. Working through the challenges of difference, ethnicity and patriarchy, we cannot rely simply on the authority of tradition. We must find our resources in the processes of democratic deliberation itself. And so in the past decade, another voice has entered this conversation on democracy, a voice building on the alternative tradition but taking a step beyond the communitarians to confront the challenge of difference. Philosophers and political theorists like Joshua Cohen have called this voice *deliberative democracy*.[18]

Jürgen Habermas has presented his own version of deliberative democracy in a conversation with Rawls's liberalism.[19] The problem with liberalism, for

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(Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996) in particular, chaps. 1 and 2.

[15]Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) in particular, chaps. 4, 5, and 17.

[16]See also Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996; c1989).

[17]Benhabib, "Introduction," in *Democracy and Difference*, 4-5, 12-14.

[18]Joshua Cohen, "Procedure and Substance in Deliberative Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference*, 95-119; "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy," in *Deliberative Democracy*, 67-91. See also Seyla Benhabib, "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy," in *Democracy and Difference*, 67-94; James Bohman, "Deliberative Democracy and Effective Social Freedom: Capabilities, Resources, and Opportunities," in *Deliberative Democracy*, 321-48.

[19]Habermas, "Three Normative Models," in *Democracy and Difference*, 21-30.

Habermas, is not its claim to universal reason, rather, it is its vision of what citizens are called to do in a democracy. Rawls's strong dividing line between the public and the private makes democracy primarily an activity of the state, not of its citizens. What the liberal state must secure is the liberty of its citizens. But once this is done, once the laws and institutions of public reason are in place, what is left are the rules of a competitive process in which aggregates of individuals are free to lobby the state to legislate in accordance with their interests. This is what happens in the fierce campaigns of elections. This is what happens in the competitive life of the free market.

The result is a liberal vision of social life in which neither the collaborative ethical projects of citizens nor the substance of their ethical claims have any real public significance. Liberal democracy, he argues, simply establishes the rules for competitive play among aggregates of individuals. And individuals need do nothing more than pursue their own interests within this competitive arena. Democracy, in this view, does not recognize that shared traditions and values really matter to public life. Habermas wants to shift the center of attention in democracy from the state back to the citizens themselves and he wants to recognize the public significance of citizens' ethical deliberation on things that matter.

Where Habermas's deliberative vision differs from the communitarians' is on the principles guiding this deliberation. Citizens live within contexts of shared identity, tradition and value, but in a democracy, these contexts are diverse and multiple. So the principles and procedures guiding public deliberation cannot be found in a prior lived identity or tradition that citizens must recover. Rather, the resource for guiding democratic deliberation in the direction of a common good will be a set of norms or imperatives that can be discerned in the act of communication itself.[20] When we participate in conversations with others, we do so with implicit norms and expectations of how we want to be heard and interpreted by them and how we expect them to recognize the validity of our arguments. Understanding and formulating these implicitly operative norms can provide grounds for universal agreement among people from diverse and conflicting contexts and traditions.

Now Habermas has not pronounced the last word on deliberative democracy. And many would regard the most significant challenge to democratic theory as the challenge of the feminist theories of difference. Authors like Iris Marion

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[20]Habermas, "Popular Sovereignty as Procedure," in *Deliberative Democracy*, 55-60. See also William Rehg, *Insight and Solidarity: The Discourse Ethics of Jürgen Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; c1994) 56-83; Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. C. Lenhardt and S. Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1990; orig. German c1983) in particular, 43-115; Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. W. Rehg (Cambridge MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1996; orig. German c1992) in particular, chaps. 7 and 8.

Young[21] argue that if Habermas has correctly criticized both the liberals and communitarians, still his own vision of a universal reason based on the structure of communication suffers from a problem similar to the liberals'. It assumes a formal procedural vision of reason that can rise above human historicity and pronounce, as if from on high. The form of communication envisioned by this theory, she argues, remains gender bound and culture bound. It is the assertive and argumentative form of speech of white, middle-class males. A true communicative democracy, she argues, must recognize the various modes of speech in which citizens of diverse cultures work out their day-to-day living.[22]

Beyond this, Young argues that the very analysis of society in terms of deliberative norms and identity groups has the effect of establishing an ideal of consensus, unity and homogeneity for social life that does violence to the reality that we live. It is certainly true we understand ourselves in terms of characteristics we share with others in a group. However, the whole truth about ourselves involves a complex overlapping among diverse groups. Aiming at the goal of social consensus will forever fail to acknowledge the hosts of differences that remain among us and that do not fall neatly within the boundaries of group identity or deliberative consensus. Such a focus will continue to do violence to the persons whose lives are not represented adequately by the normative visions of dominant groups.[23] For democracy to work properly, its goal must be the articulation of difference. And the principal goal of communication in democracy must be the ongoing transformation of citizens as we speak across difference.[24]

DISCUSSION:
DEMOCRACY AND THE DECENTERING OF SOCIAL LIVING

I want to take a moment, now, to step back from this conversation, to situate some of the salient points in relation to the war in Iraq, and draw out what I think are some of the important vectors that can guide our thinking and learning. I think Sheldon Wolin and Jürgen Habermas are correct that with the liberal and deliberative visions we are presented with very different ways of thinking about democracy. One of the fundamental differences between these is the way liberals draw a hard and fast boundary between the public and the private realms and

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[21]Iris Marion Young, "Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference*, 120-35; "Difference as a Resource for Democratic Communication," in *Deliberative Democracy*, 383-406; *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) in particular, chaps. 6 and 7. See also Benhabib, "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy," in *Democracy and Difference*, 67-94; and "Introduction," in *Democracy and Difference*, 11-14.

[22]Young, "Communication and the Other," in *Democracy and Difference*, 122-24.

[23]Young, "Difference as a Resource," in *Deliberative Democracy*, 385-89.

[24]Young "Communication and the Other," in *Democracy and Difference*, 127.

entrust nations with securing and defending the institutions that guard this boundary.[25] Private ideas are up for continual debate and renegotiation in a liberal democracy but public ideas are not easily amended or altered. This is because public ideas establish the institutions that guarantee the freedom of debate itself. Liberal thinking focuses on institutions and on the role of government in securing and defending these institutions.

In the liberal vision, events like Iraq illustrate precisely why this must be so. Democracy stands opposed to tyranny, tyranny is hostile to freedom and democratic institutions defend us against the invasion of tyranny. Only strong institutions secured by nation states can provide citizens with the free spaces for living out the freedom of ideas. Elected officials are entrusted with the power of military force and the responsibility of using it when these basic principles are threatened. We can debate whether the conditions for war are, indeed, fulfilled. But these debates must be conducted within the framework of liberal institutions. *War on Iraq, in this view, can be conceived as a war on behalf of democracy.* And there can be no doubt that this image of fighting for democracy goes to the heart of the narratives and symbols that have been part of the mainstay of North American culture for as long as we can remember.

The deliberative vision, on the other hand, does not hold to this hard and fast institutional boundary. To call religious and philosophical convictions private is to devalue their public significance. Moreover, when we reach into the substance of our diverse traditions, we find ideas that can challenge the very heart of democratic institutions in the name of democracy itself. Elected officials do not hold a special position of privilege when it comes to interpreting whether the basic conditions of democracy are threatened. In some way, they must sit at the table with everyone else, without any special powers of discernment, and allow the force of the best argument to prevail.[26] This means that world leaders must be held accountable to public deliberation in ways that will require an ongoing scrutiny of institutions. This is because, in the deliberative vision, what matters most is how we conduct our democratic living.

Deliberative theorists are convinced that measures to promote and defend democratic institutions must themselves be democratic: they must embody the very principles of participatory deliberation itself. If this requires continual negotiations with Iraq and continuing weapons inspections, even when the process appears endless, then this is what we must do. Democracy is not only the end, it must also be the means. It is the full and equal participation of all citizens in the deliberation process that governments must promote and defend. *In the*

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[25]This is Sheldon Wolin's argument in "Fugitive Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference*, 31-45. See also Benhabib, "Toward a Deliberative Model," in *Democracy and Difference*, 74-77.

[26]I suggest that this is the overall thrust of Joshua Cohen's argument in "Procedure and Substance," in *Democracy and Difference*, 95-119.

final analysis, deliberative democracy sees war as the failure of democracy, not an instrument for its defense.

I want to suggest that there is something central to the deliberative vision that must claim our attention and guide our learning at this moment in history. I say this, not because the liberal focus on state institutions is not important—it most certainly is—but because this focus has controlled our thinking for too long and has eclipsed our understanding of what our institutions must serve and on what they depend for their work.[27]

There is a distinctive form of social living that emerges in history when citizens gather themselves into patterns of cooperation where all members participate in the collective work of discerning and deciding how they will live together.[28] It is the sort of thing we experience when we find ourselves in good conversations. Neither party sets out the agenda, no one manages the process, yet the scheme of events unfolds as an extremely satisfying pattern. Each listens with interest to the other, each patterns her intervention in response to the other, each checks to see if he has understood correctly, and each learns and is transformed by the encounter with the other.

To help ensure that more conversations become good conversations, at some point we must get down to the business of understanding the inner structure of discourse, formulating the obligations of participants and cultivating in generations of citizens the skills and virtues necessary for engaging in good conversations in diverse contexts of life. In this way, the procedures of deliberation and discourse become institutionalized.[29] Yet good conversations do not await the

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[27]I am reminded here of Eric Voegelin's project in *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974; orig. 1952) which launched his multivolume *Order in History*, 5 vols. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956–1987). He found existing theories in political science limited to an apologetics of extant institutions and sought a deeper understanding of the meaning-making and symbolizing activities that are crystallized in the institutions. See also *Anamnesis*, trans. G. Niemeyer (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978; orig. 1966).

[28]For an analysis of this cooperative form of social living based on the work of Bernard Lonergan, see Kenneth R. Melchin, *Living with Other People: An Introduction to Christian Ethics Based On Bernard Lonergan* (Ottawa: Novalis; Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1998) chap. 2. I am indebted to J. Michael Stebbins for the expression, "patterns of cooperation." See "Business, Faith, and the Common Good," *Review of Business* 19 (Fall 1997): 5-8; "Toward a Developmental Understanding of the Common Good," in *Religion and Public Life: The Legacy of Monsignor John A. Ryan*, ed. R. G. Kennedy et al. (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2001) 119-31; "The Meaning of Solidarity," in *Labor, Solidarity, and the Common Good: Essays on the Ethical Foundations of Management*, ed. S. A. Cortright (Durham NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2001) 61-74. Lonergan uses the expression "the good of order" and he develops the basic ideas in *Insight*, chaps. 7 and 18, and in *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990; orig. 1972) chap. 2.

[29]Jean Ladrière uses the term *instauration* to describe this process in which informally

formulations and institutions. They emerge as patterns of meaningful cooperation prior to explicit institutionalization, as the lived experience that is understood and formalized eventually in the institutions themselves. Most important, they only function well when citizens have internalized the "habits of the heart"[30] required for living up to their demands.

What is distinctive about the patterns of cooperation of democratic living is not that they are institutionalized but that they are *decentered*.[31] An extraordinary portrait of this decentered structure has been painted by Jane Jacobs in her compelling studies of cities and economies.[32] In meandering through city neighborhoods, she observes how the "eyes on the street" of citizens living in busy city regions ensure the security of children in ways that could never be achieved by police working alone. She notices how these "eyes on the street" are not engineered but are drawn to the street by the flows of interesting people going to and from diverse places of work, entertainment, governance, and commerce.[33]

Similarly, in free-market economies, it is not the orchestrated projects of transplanted corporations that ensure economic development, but the self-coordinated efforts of diverse people vigorously innovating in city regions, solving problems, replacing imports, creating markets, fashioning new export capacities and cultivating the resources for further innovation.[34] What makes these patterns democratic is an internal structure that distributes the tasks of discerning and deciding among all participants.

We commonly think about democracy as belonging to the explicit realm of politics. However, we are seeing a growing focus on the diverse and informal ways that democracy is lived out in the multiple spheres of life. Michael Walzer

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emergent social structures are understood, appropriated, and institutionalized. See "L'Invention politique," in *Phénoménologie et politique*, ed. M. Abensour et al. (Bruxelles: Ousia, 1989) 363-95.

[30]See Robert Neelly Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (repr.: New York: Harper & Row/Perennial Library, 1986; c1985). See chap. 11 for an understanding of how "social ecologies" are rooted in "habits of the heart" and how reconstituting the social world requires the transformation and renewal of these habits.

[31]Habermas makes this argument in "Three Normative Models," in *Democracy and Difference*, 27. See also Benhabib, "Introduction," in *Democracy and Difference*, 6.

[32]See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House/Vintage Books, 1961); *The Economy of Cities* (New York: Random House/Vintage Books, 1970; c1969); *Cities and the Wealth of Nations: Principles of Economic Life* (New York: Random House/Vintage Books, 1985; c1984); *Systems of Survival: A Dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics* (New York: Random House/Vintage Books, 1994; c1992); *The Nature of Economies* (New York: Random House/The Modern Library, 2000). See also Fred Lawrence, ed., *Ethics in Making a Living: The Jane Jacobs Conference* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

[33]Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, chap. 2.

[34]Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, chaps. 2 and 3.

has argued that the idea of justice is not restricted to politics nor is it lived out and practiced identically in the various spheres of social life.[35] In education, economy, religion, family, and defense we find ourselves living out distinctive patterns or practices that have their own inner logic. Each gives rise to a distinct notion of justice that is specific to that sphere. Joshua Cohen has highlighted the importance of hosts of secondary associations that must mediate between individual citizens and the formal institutions of government in a well-functioning democracy.[36] And Iris Young has pointed to the diversity of forms of communication, such as greeting, rhetoric and storytelling, through which citizens of differing cultures solve collective problems.[37] In all of these analyses, we are invited to move beyond a focus on political institutions to recognize the many informal ways that democracy is lived.

I offer these examples as images that need to refocus our thinking and learning. Democracy is not simply about institutions, it is a way of living. And it is not simply about politics, it is lived in all spheres of life. It is a way of living that gathers its citizens in a decentered form of social life that: (1) emerges differently in different spheres; (2) is achieved and lived informally or spontaneously before it is understood and appropriated formally in institutions; and (3) draws on the ongoing learning and participation of citizens for its overall form and function.[38]

But there is another sense in which democratic societies are decentered. To participate authentically in decentered patterns of cooperation, we citizens ourselves must be decentered: we must move out of our own interests to learn and live out the obligations arising in cooperative living. Iris Young has argued that effective communication must give rise to a transformation of participants in which all are drawn out of their respective horizons to confront perspectives that cannot be assimilated into their own.[39] Effective communication presents participants with the challenge of self-transcendence. And John Haughey has taken an additional step to argue that this self-transcendence itself has a dynamic structure that must be learned and appropriated if we are to make good on the obligations entailed in our commitment to human rights.[40]

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[35]Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). The basic argument is laid out in chap. 1. See, in particular, 17-20.

[36]Cohen, "Procedure and Substance," in *Democracy and Difference*, 110-13.

[37]Young, "Communication and the Other," in *Democracy and Difference*, 128-33.

[38]For an example of an ethical analysis of drunk driving that draws upon this understanding of decentered patterns of social cooperation, see Kenneth R. Melchin, "Moral Knowledge and the Structure of Cooperative Living," *Theological Studies* 52 (1991): 495-523.

[39]Young, "Communication and the Other," in *Democracy and Difference*, 127-28.

[40]John Haughey, "Responsibility for Human Rights: Contributions from Bernard Lonergan," *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 764-85.

Democracy, I suggest, has been conceived for too long simply in terms of the political institutions for securing individual liberties. Such a vision has obscured our understanding of the diverse patterns of cooperation that establish the real conditions for the liberties we have enjoyed. And it has allowed us to forget the habits of self-transcendence and the virtues that must be cultivated if citizens are to live out the obligations entailed in these patterns. As we watch the dangerous process of reconstruction go forward in Iraq, we are reminded daily of the extensive webs of cooperation that will need to be rebuilt to secure the basic routines of life. If this building is truly democratic, these patterns of cooperation will be the principal places where this democracy will be lived. When this happens, it is the hearts of citizens that will hold the resources and instruments for its sustained achievement.

For political institutions to do their work, they will need to model and nurture the virtues of cooperation that are fundamental to this decentered pattern of living. Nowhere, I suggest, will this modeling be more important than in the international, multilateral negotiations of world governance. We can suppose that opportunities for this modeling will continue to present themselves in the events around the rebuilding of Iraq. And we can hope that our political leaders will discover enough of the truth about participatory learning and cooperative living to seize these opportunities and find the inner resources for living up to their demands.

OUR VOCATION AS THEOLOGIANS

What, then, of our task as theologians? When Charles Taylor delivered his Marianist Award Lecture to the University of Dayton in 1996, he observed that with "modernity," Western society has taken up the challenge of a high and demanding ethical project.[41] Our commitment to universal human rights, social justice, solidarity, universal benevolence, liberty and authenticity set high standards for us as citizens. But he questioned whether the inner resources of a secular humanist society would be sufficient to provide the energy, vision and commitment to live out this project.

As things stand, we frequently look for ethical motivation in a sense of public shame, or an ability to connect our self-worth to the worth of others, or a sense of justice. He observed, however, that these have proven rather unreliable as resources. For they have been subject to the shifting sands of public opinion or have easily crashed or turned to rage and violence on encountering the force of personal and social sin. Taylor's call for a "Catholic Modernity" invites us to probe our Christian faith traditions for resources to sustain us in this demanding calling.

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[41]Charles Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity?" in *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture*, ed. James Heft (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 13-37.

Nowhere is this need for the resources of our faith traditions more apparent than in the decentered patterns of cooperative living of democracy. As long as we were allowed to think of democracy as state institutions for securing liberty, we could go on believing that our safety could be assured by strong governments with strong security forces. However, I think this has been an illusion. Democracy, it seems, can only be secured fully through the informed and responsible work of citizens living out their commitments to each other in all spheres of life. Taylor's question, then, about resources for sustaining this commitment, is a good one. Moreover, his call to look to our faith traditions needs to be understood, not simply as a luxury provided by democracy, but as a basic and necessary condition for the maintenance of democracy itself.

In some way, living democracy requires looking beyond democracy. There is a complexity and a fragility to the project of decentered living that will forever challenge our understanding and our commitment. Decentered patterns of cooperation are structures of human meaning and they take on diverse forms that change subtly as the conditions and habits of meanings of citizens change through society and history. This means that they need continually to be reunderstood and this understanding places a burden of sustained learning on citizens that regularly will be more than we will bear.[42] More than any form of social living, democracy highlights the tension between transcendence and limitation that marks the structure of our existence. To live this tension authentically requires cultivating habits of hope beyond the mere expectations of achievement. And as Christians, we look for such resources of hope, not in the sustained proof of success in our living, but in the reconciliation and redemptive grace that is offered in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Yet turning to our Christian faith tradition for a way of thinking and living democracy seems to challenge something central to the idea of democracy itself. More than any other symbol, democracy has stood for the separation of church and state and the call to keep religion out of politics so its institutions could admit a plurality of religious traditions. This has led us to believe that we can and must conduct political life in secular terms, without reference to the symbols of our religious heritage.

Eric Voegelin has argued, however, that this separation of religion and politics may be more difficult to achieve than we have imagined. In his multivolume work, *Order in History,* he illustrates how political meaning making has always and will always have the tendency to become religious.[43] Politics seems forever to make ultimate claims about world events and perennially symbolizes them in relation to ultimate or divinely ordained orders of truth. This, he claimed,

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[42]Bernard Lonergan discusses this burden of sustained learning and the obstacles to its achievement in terms of "dramatic bias," "individual bias," "group bias," and "general bias." See *Insight*, chaps. 6 and 7.

[43]The general argument is laid out in *The New Science of Politics*, in particular, chaps. 1 and 2, and informs the historical analyses of the 5 volumes of *Order in History*.

was the result of the symbolizing dynamism of human consciousness itself.[44] Our political symbols gather us together in patterns of common identity and mobilize us for common action in accordance with images that, in some way, we invariably hold to be mirrors of cosmic or divine order.

The irony, of course, is that the very idea of the separation between church and state has its origins in Augustine's theology, in his distinction between the human and divine cities, in *The City of God*. Only the ecclesial order of symbols can point beyond human affairs to the realm of the absolutely transcendent. So for politics to be kept from becoming idolatrous, it must forever remain within the order of earthly symbols of the human city. For Augustine, the distinction between religion and a secular politics only makes sense within a Christian theological understanding of the person and political life.[45]

But Voegelin also observed the tension that was introduced into this formula when Christian symbols of grace and salvation were recognized by Augustine as acting within world affairs. With the death and resurrection of Christ and the ongoing gift of the Spirit in history, the line between the orders of politics and transcendence becomes rather complex. Earthly affairs must now be understood in some partial way, not only as the work of humans but also as the mysterious work of God's redemptive grace.[46] This is what is celebrated so dramatically in liberation theology.[47] Yet Voegelin warned that losing sight of the tension that this creates can give rise to a form of gnosticism that assigns religious authority to political programs. This danger looms large in Western secularized political societies that imagine themselves to be free from the taint of religious symbols. And Voegelin saw the horrific abuses of Stalin's Communism and Hitler's National Socialism as manifestations of this secularized gnosticism.

Commentators have observed the dangerous influence of this uncritical religious symbolism in American politics. In the past few years, authors like Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence have drawn our attention to the way apocalyptic movements in the U.S. and around the world have fueled popular visions of "roads to heaven that are paved with the corpses of those they detest."[48] These visions have captured the hearts of Americans in the form of a

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[44]See Voegelin, *Anamnesis*.

[45]See the discussion of the relationship between politics and theology in Augustine by R. A. Markus in *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988; c1970) 72-104.

[46]Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, chaps. 3 and 4.

[47]For an analysis of this complex tension and how it is transformed through a "spirituality of liberation" in Gustavo Gutiérrez's *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, see Kenneth R. Melchin, "Liberation and Spirituality in Gustavo Gutiérrez," *Pastoral Sciences/Sciences Pastorales* 6 (1987): 65-80.

[48]Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *Captain America and the Crusade against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2003) 131 and elsewhere, 131-48. See also the works of Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God*

millennialism they have called "the Captain America complex." Once confined to the margins of American life, they argue that this religious vision has now moved into mainstream political consciousness. And they trace its influence on the rhetoric of recent American political leaders.

If Voegelin is correct, and I think world events are proving that he may well be, then politics will forever present theologians with the task of ferreting out the religious symbols that have become embedded in political rhetoric and submitting them to critical theological analysis.[49] In some important way, I suggest that democracy itself has followed this road of all political symbols and assumed its place in the religious pantheon of popular imagination. I think that for some time now, we have been celebrating this quasireligious status is our endless orgies of liturgical violence in film, television and video-game battles for democracy. If we lose sight of this ineluctable dynamism of human consciousness towards the divine, we may forget that we have become religious in our political convictions and, worse, that we have used this religious power in politics in ways that may prove the undoing of all the good we have endeavored to build.

If we are serious about learning about democracy, we must get serious about the eschatalogical tension inherent in the very symbol of democracy itself. Like all high values we have judged to be true, democracy must be subjected both to the theological critique of idolatry and the discernment of grace in history. We know that our political programs and institutions cannot be understood as the full realization of God's kingdom on earth.Yet, as we come to better understand democracy and what it requires of us, we also know that if we are to live up to its demands, we will need to draw upon the resources of our faith traditions to sustain our commitment. More than this, as Christians, we know that when we work for good, we do not work alone. In some mysterious way, our own faltering efforts of reaching towards democracy are forever corrected and completed by God's redemptive work of grace. Cultivating the theological tools for this continued discernment must now be our ongoing contribution to the project of democracy.[50]

(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000) and Lee Griffith, *The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2002). I am indebted to Normand Bonneau for these references.

[49]For a fascinating and provocative analysis of religious beliefs, with their implied visions of social and political life, that the author claims are hidden in theories in mathematics, physics, psychology, see Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001; c1991).

[50]For some good examples of such theological analyses, see, e.g., R. Bruce Douglass and David Hollenbach, eds. *Catholicism and Liberalism*; Robert Kraynak, *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy: God and Politics in the Fallen World* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001); Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, *Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993);

CONCLUSION

So we come to the end of our journey and are left at the beginning of a much longer and more difficult journey of learning. We have fought a war in Iraq in the name of democracy. Yet the way we have done so risks undermining the very project of world democracy that we have championed. I have argued that we have much learning to do about the idea of democracy itself. Our imaginations have been galvanized by the liberal focus on political institutions. In some way, we have been led to hope that democracy could be achieved by strong institutions secured by strong powers of government security. Yet, our own day-to-day living seems to suggest otherwise. There is another way of thinking about democracy that resonates with a wider body of evidence about our living. We do not only live democracy in political institutions. We do so in all spheres of our lives. In fact, it is this decentered, self-transcending pattern of cooperative living in everyday life that cultivates the habits and virtues that we draw upon when we do things explicitly political. Without them, the institutions of democracy are an empty shell.

This decentered living demands much of us. More than anything, it demands self-transcendence—that effort of reaching beyond ourselves to grasp and become something new that is so painfully thrust upon us throughout adult life. We do not do this sort of thing easily. If granted our desires, we probably would not choose to do it at all. Yet this is what democracy demands of us. This is because the decentered patterns of cooperation in democracy have an inner logic that issues obligations to all who would share in their fruits. Unfortunately, we have not been told much about this.

Neither have we been told much about the way our symbols of fighting for democracy have become part of our secularized religious tradition. We have thought that we held to a separation of church and state and that we had become a secular society. Yet our psyches seem to have their own dynamic thrust towards transcendent visions of order and truth. There remains a wealth of Christian eschatalogical symbolism that has been taken up in our rhetoric about democracy. Our journey of learning requires the complex theological work of ferreting out these symbols and critically evaluating when they are used responsibly and when they become destructive.

One final note. Doing this work of theological analysis means working democratically. Ours is no longer a task that can be pursued solely within the halls of our own religious traditions. We must now work alongside women and men of other faith traditions in the theological task itself. We Christians are not alone in investing our political projects with religious meaning. Nor are we alone in learning how we have misconstrued the causes we have championed. We have

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David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

developed our own tools of political and theological analysis but we also have much to learn from the work of other faiths and traditions. The ongoing work of learning about democracy must now be a work of interfaith dialogue, both in the name of critique and liberation and in the name of the common good and cooperative living. This means finding diverse ways of working together. Most important, it requires finding ways of celebrating together the riches of the diverse traditions that sustain us in living out our commitment to democracy.

As Catholic theologians, I think we have something very special to bring to this difficult journey of theological learning on world democracy. It is the calm and secure conviction that whenever we face the painful challenge of self-transcendence in living democratically with others, we can expect to encounter the mystery of God's love.[51] We can expect this Divine encounter in international political negotiations that seem stupid and endless. We can expect it in the impossible exchanges with our own leaders. We can expect it as we work theologically alongside women and men of other faith traditions. And, I would venture to say that we can expect it as we celebrate our diverse faith traditions together. If we have something to offer each other as we gather together as Catholic theologians, I think it is renewing this confidence. Perhaps more than anything, sustaining hope in this encounter with Divine love in the places that seem most hopeless is our "Vocation as Theologians."

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[51]For a wonderful analysis, which draws on the work of Lonergan to explore how the Bible shapes our expectations of encountering God in diverse spheres of life, see Sean McEvenue, *Interpretation and Bible* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1994) in particular, 23-39 and 65-73. See also *Interpreting the Pentateuch* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1990).