

Religion in Public: Macmurray on Religion and Politics

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Abstract

The discussion surrounding the role of religious reasons in public debate remains unresolved in the United States. Alternatively, but relatedly, when politicians and Archbishops in the UK mention God the media react with force. This article seeks a more balanced reaction to the faith of politicians and archbishops and a solution to the Wolterstorff-Audi debate. First, this paper expounds Macmurray's account of church-state relations; secondly, it introduces the philosophical notion of supervenience to provide a proper account of the relation between religious reasons and secular reasons in public debate; thirdly, it provides an example of a 'community' that satisfies the essential criteria of Macmurray's definition; and finally, it clarifies Macmurray's position in relation to contemporary communitarianism and traditional Christianity. Thus, while engaging with an ongoing international conversation on the place of religious voices in public places, this paper highlights the contemporary relevance of Macmurray's work.

Keywords

Nicholas Wolterstorff, Robert Audi, John Macmurray, religious reasons, public square, communitarianism, Christianity

The material in this address can be found in a fuller form in Esther McIntosh's book *John Macmurray's Religious Philosophy: What It Means to be a Person*, <http://www.ashgate.com/isbn/9780754651635>.

Introduction

In the book *Religion in the Public Square*, by Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, Audi states that 'the ethics appropriate to a liberal democracy constrains religious considerations . . . because of its commitment to preserving the liberty of all'.¹ On the contrary, Wolterstorff states: 'I see no reason to suppose that the ethic of the citizen in a liberal democracy includes a restraint on the use of religious reasons in deciding and discussing political issues'.² Audi's position rests on the assumption that virtuous citizens 'try to contribute in some way to the welfare of others'³ and that in a religiously diverse society this means having secular (understood as non-religious or public as opposed to a-religious) arguments for supporting public policy. In other words, Audi maintains that religious justification for public policy restricts the freedom of those who do not hold to that religion, whereas secular reasons are available to all citizens. Wolterstorff, on the other hand, argues for the inclusion of religious reasons in public debate on two grounds: first, he maintains that respecting the freedom and equality of other citizens rests on genuine debate rather than religious constraint; secondly, he argues that persons with religious reasons cannot leave them out of the debate, since 'we cannot leap out of our perspectives'.⁴ Consequently, there is something of an impasse between Audi and Wolterstorff concerning the use of religious reasons in public debate.

It is my contention that we can find a middle ground between the positions espoused by Wolterstorff and Audi by considering Macmurray's account of church-state relations and, further, I propose that religious reasons supervene on secular reasons.⁵ Through the use of

¹ Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square: Debating Church and State* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), p. 174.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 111-12.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁵ I am using the term supervenience to mean that where there is a difference in religious reasons there must be a difference in the secular reasons.

Macmurray's work and the notion of supervenience, in addition to carrying on the Wolterstorff-Audi debate, I will put forward an objective response to the media frenzy occasioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams', suggestion that the recognition of aspects of Shari'ah law is 'unavoidable'⁶ in our society and the earlier similar media frenzy occasioned by the former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair's, remark that God will judge his decision to go to war with Iraq.⁷ Finally, I will give a practical example of community-building amongst religiously and culturally diverse citizens, and end with a Macmurrain analysis of Christianity and communitarianism.

Macmurray's Philosophy

Macmurray's work operates both as a description of person-to-person relations and as a prescription for the way in which we ought (morally) to relate to our fellow human beings. In addition, as Macmurray unpacks his thesis he reveals that his interest in the moral aspect of the relations of persons is intimately related to his concern with justice. He states:

Justice is that negative aspect of morality which is necessary to the constitution of the positive, though subordinate within it. Morality can only be defined through its positive aspect, yet it can only be realized through its own negative. Without justice, morality becomes illusory and sentimental, the mere appearance of morality.⁸

Hence, Macmurray's moral philosophy is a political philosophy also.

Moreover, Macmurray's work on justice turns out to be an account of his view of the proper connection and space between political institutions and religious ones. It is Macmurray's contention that 'religion has its ground and origin in the problematic of the relation of persons, and reflects that problem'; in short, 'religion is about the community of persons'.⁹

Macmurray on Church-State Relations

Hence, Macmurray makes a distinction between the definition of a society and the definition of a community. He states:

There are groups which consist of people co-operating for certain specific purposes, like trade unions, or cricket clubs, or co-operative societies. There are, on the other hand, groups which are bound together by something deeper than any purpose – by the sharing of a common life.¹⁰

For Macmurray only the latter type is properly referred to as a community. In his Gifford lectures he states that 'The members of a community are in communion with one another, and their association is a fellowship'.¹¹ Nonetheless, society and community are not to be understood in mutually exclusive terms, but rather as 'two elements of unity which enter into all groups'.¹² A society therefore may exhibit differing degrees of community at any given time, just as every community will also require the functional relation of its members to deal with practical matters. (Thus, we may enter into friendships with our work colleagues and we may need a dish-washing rota in the family home.)

However, according to Macmurray, individualism and the breakdown of communal bonds leads to an over-emphasis on the functional aspects of life.¹³ On the contrary,

⁶ BBC Radio 4, 'Rowan Williams Interview', 7 February 2008.

⁷ Michael White, 'God will judge me, PM tells Parkinson', *The Guardian*, 4 March 2006.

⁸ John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber, 1961), pp. 188-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹¹ Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, p. 146.

¹² John Macmurray, *A Challenge to the Churches* (London: Kegan Paul, 1941), p. 22.

¹³ John Macmurray, 'People and their Jobs', talk 1 from series 'Persons and Functions', *The Listener*, 26 (1941), 759.

Macmurray argues that life is ‘more-than-functional’; he illustrates this point with the example of eating; while we eat for nourishment, eating is often a social occasion and an opportunity for fellowship.¹⁴ Hence, Macmurray states that ‘The functional life is *for* the personal life; the personal life is *through* the functional life’.¹⁵ In today’s language of work-life balance then, Macmurray is insisting that we work to live and not live to work, because, he states, ‘it is through our personal relationships that we become individual persons’.¹⁶

According to Macmurray, the personal or more-than-functional aspect of life ‘is the life of community’.¹⁷ Moreover, he maintains that ‘Religion is concerned with community. Politics is concerned with society’.¹⁸ On a broader scale, it is apparent that the organization of the functional aspect of human life, the relation of humans as citizens, is the arena of politics, but Macmurray contends that ‘community can only be properly expressed and nourished by religious institutions’.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Macmurray is highly critical of the other-worldly institutionalized religion with which he is familiar and of the associated prevalent perception of religion as an individual and private affair. He states that ‘individualism is incompatible with religion because it is incompatible with social unity’.²⁰ For Macmurray, ‘Religion is concerned with the relations of people as persons, in their character as human beings’.²¹ Thus, when Macmurray argues that community is created and sustained by religion, he is referring to a ‘reflective activity which expresses the consciousness of community’.²² In brief, he states that ‘religion is the celebration of communion’.²³

If, then, the religious aspect of life is synonymous with the personal aspect of life and the political is synonymous with the functional, on the basis of Macmurray’s principle for proper work-life balance, we can assert that politics ought to serve religion and not vice-versa. As Macmurray argues, ‘the State is *for* the community; the community is *through* the State’.²⁴ Consequently, church and state have distinct but interdependent roles. Church and state do not exist independently because the functional and personal aspects of life are not separate lives; they can be separated at the theoretical level, but not at the practical level.²⁵ Thus, the church’s communal bonds are imaginary without cooperation for a common purpose and provision for one another’s needs, and the state’s sense of common purpose is minimal without some degree of communal life making cooperation possible. Hence, Macmurray states that ‘A good political and economic system is one which provides as fully as possible for the personal life of its citizens, and for all of them equally’.²⁶

In addition, Macmurray is arguing that the proper limits of political control are set by religion; he suggests that ‘in a sane world, religion will control politics’.²⁷ The subordination of religion to politics is the extension of Macmurray’s principle concerning work-life balance and the means by which the good life; that is, the life of community and therefore the development of persons *as persons*, is safeguarded. He states: ‘If the inequalities of the

¹⁴ John Macmurray, ‘Fellowship in a Common Life’, talk 2 from series ‘Persons and Functions’, *The Listener*, 26 (1941), 787.

¹⁵ John Macmurray, ‘Two Lives in One’, talk 3 from series ‘Persons and Functions’, *The Listener*, 26 (1941), 822 (original italics).

¹⁶ Macmurray, ‘Fellowship in a Common Life’, 787.

¹⁷ John Macmurray, ‘The Community of Mankind’, talk 4 from series ‘Persons and Functions’, *The Listener*, 26 (1941), 856.

¹⁸ Macmurray, *A Challenge to the Churches*, p. 24.

¹⁹ Macmurray, ‘The Community of Mankind’, 856.

²⁰ Macmurray, *A Challenge to the Churches*, p. 16.

²¹ John Macmurray, ‘Explanatory Statement’ from series ‘Persons and Functions’, unpublished typescript, 19 September 1941 (The John Macmurray Special Collection, Regis College Library, Toronto: Item 41.12).

²² Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, p. 162.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Macmurray, ‘The Community of Mankind’, 856 (original italics).

²⁵ Macmurray, ‘Two Lives in One’.

²⁶ Macmurray, ‘The Community of Mankind’, 856.

²⁷ Macmurray, *A Challenge to the Churches*, p. 28.

functional life are not subordinated to the deeper equality of human fellowship, they become absolute, and community perishes'.²⁸ Moreover, Macmurray warns us that where religion is too weak to create and maintain the internal bonds of fellowship, politics will be expected to impose external bonds of unity.²⁹ However, when politics controls religion, totalitarianism results, making 'the State the arbiter of spiritual values'.³⁰ In essence, then, Macmurray is arguing that religion is essential to democracy. In fact, Macmurray claims:

So long as religion is excluded from the competence of political authority, everything is excluded which democracy requires. And religion could of itself enforce the limitation of political authority which democracy demands. Indeed, in the long run, only religion is capable of doing this.³¹

For Macmurray then, democracy is closely bound up with community, since democracy operates on a principle of equality, and it is communities of fellowship that override functional inequalities. Politics can provide the conditions required for societies to develop into communities of equals by creating systems of cooperation, which seek justice through law, but communities cannot be created by force.

Religious Voices in Public Places³²

Thus, Macmurray does have a liberal democratic policy, viewing religion and politics as having different, but interdependent roles. Hence, he reminds us not to expect politicians to administer to every area of life. In short, Macmurray's theory implies that government ought to concern itself with society, leaving the creation and sustenance of community to religion. Nonetheless, Macmurray's account of religion is based on the presumption that Britain is essentially Christian. Contemporary politics, however, is grappling with the reality of religious pluralism and the decreased sense of community bound-up with both secularization and multiculturalism. Nevertheless, when Macmurray states that 'The proper relation of religion and politics is the unsolved problem of our civilization',³³ this is a statement with which Wolterstorff agrees.

Wolterstorff states:

'political liberalism' is that now-familiar version of political theory, articulating and defending the liberal democratic polity, which holds that it belongs to the role of citizen in such a polity to appeal to 'public' or 'secular' reason for conducting debates in public on political matters and for making political decisions. John Rawls, Robert Audi, and Charles Lamore, are prominent examples of such theorists.³⁴

In other words, it is a commonly held principle of political liberalism that political principles should be underpinned by secular rather than religious reasons. The purpose of this principle is to ensure that reasons cited are accessible by all, through the human capacity for reason, and do not require agreement with a set of religious beliefs. Moreover, according to Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida, Immanuel Kant and others, if religious reasons were given for political legislation, not all citizens would be able to accept them

²⁸ Macmurray, 'Two Lives in One'.

²⁹ Macmurray, 'The Community of Mankind'.

³⁰ Macmurray, 'Explanatory Statement' from series 'Persons and Functions'.

³¹ Macmurray, *A Challenge to the Churches*, p. 15.

³² The phrase 'religious voices in public places' is borrowed from the subtitle of the first 'Religion and Political Liberalism' colloquium noted above.

³³ Macmurray, 'Explanatory Statement' from series 'Persons and Functions'.

³⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Why Can't We All Just Get Along With Each Other?', forthcoming paper delivered at 'Religion and Political Liberalism I: Religious Voices in Public Places' colloquium, Institute for Advanced Research in Religion, Ethics and Public Life, School of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds (2-4 June 2003), typescript, 24 pp at p. 1. The views expressed in this paper are found also in Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square*.

and violence would result.³⁵ In short, peace requires that religious resources should not be appealed to in public debate on political issues.

Indeed, the first black President of the United States, Barack Obama, while openly practising Christianity concurs with the view that religious reasons are inappropriate bedfellows for political debate. He states:

What our deliberative, pluralistic democracy demands is that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal values. It requires that their proposals must be subject to argument and amenable to reason. If I am opposed to abortion for religious reasons and seek to pass a law banning the practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church or invoke God's will and expect that argument to carry the day. 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.³⁶

However, Wolterstorff contends that it is absurd to think that all citizens will agree with a piece of legislation because religious reasons have been left out of the debate.³⁷ In addition, he states that 'there is no prospect whatsoever . . . of all adherents of particular religions refraining from using the resources of their own religion in making political decisions'.³⁸ Thus, while disputing the theory behind political liberalism, in support of liberal democracy Wolterstorff sets out the principles that he holds are necessary for a liberal democratic polity to maintain peace in a religiously diverse society. His first principle concerns the separation of church and state. He maintains that church and state are distinct powers with distinct areas of authority; such as excommunication and incarceration.³⁹ Secondly, he argues that all citizens should be treated equally, regardless of their religion.⁴⁰ Hence the state should not be expected to create or sustain any religion and should accept that not all citizens will agree with legislation, but that legislation will be shaped by the votes of the religious and the secular. According to Wolterstorff, peace is not maintained by appealing to secular reasons in support of legislation, rather, he suggests that 'stability depends on the great majority having reasons based on their own perspectives for accepting the principles [above] of social organization'.⁴¹

Hence, Wolterstorff argues that religious reasons should enter public debate. While we can agree that religions will appeal to their own resources in consideration of legislation and so it may be more honest to appeal to those reasons than to leave them out, in Macmurrayian terms this is another example, albeit a weaker one perhaps, of politics outstepping its proper limits. It seems that Wolterstorff is assuming that politics, if it includes religious reasons, can sustain peace. In effect, Wolterstorff has submerged the personal life in the functional life; rather than subordinating the latter to the former. Thus, it seems that Wolterstorff could offer a more complete picture of human relations by incorporating Macmurray's work. As Frank Kirkpatrick notes, Macmurray 'was trying, in effect . . . to provide the 'something else' or 'something more' beyond political principles that is needed to

³⁵ Audi and Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square*, p. 8 citing Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 169; p. 9 citing John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997) and James K. A. Smith, 'Determined Violence: Derrida's Structural Religion', *Journal of Religion*, 78:2 (1998), 197-212; p. 11 citing Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), Book Three Division One part V, pp. 99-100.

³⁶ Barack Obama, *The Audacity to Hope* (2006), cited by *The Times*, 5 November 2006.

³⁷ Wolterstorff, 'Why Can't We All Just Get Along With Each Other?', p. 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

sustain human unity'.⁴² Macmurray is certain that democracy cannot exist if it excludes religion, but he also maintains that peace requires more than politics.

Nevertheless, the political liberal theory that Wolterstorff critiques for leaving out religion is predominant in Britain. As we mentioned at the beginning, former Prime Minister Tony Blair's brief reference to God in the 2006 Parkinson interview was seized on by the media. Similarly, at the start of the war with Iraq there were several media reports (including *The Telegraph*, BBC News and *The Independent*) regarding the silencing of religious rhetoric. Alistair Campbell is widely reported to have intervened in an interview to prevent Blair answering a question about his religious beliefs; according to the reports Campbell stated, 'we don't do God'.⁴³ Likewise, at the same time, the media claimed that Blair's aides had intervened to prevent him from ending his address to the nation with the words 'God bless you'; Blair was persuaded to say 'thank you' instead, on the grounds that the British public would be alienated by and do not want to hear politicians making religious statements.⁴⁴

Moreover, the avoidance of giving religious reasons in public extends beyond politicians and even includes religious leaders. In an interview with Alan Rusbridger, when questioned about his surprising lack of public pronouncements on moral issues, Rowan Williams claimed that society is missing the point by expecting the church to provide moral leadership.⁴⁵ Williams holds that using religion to pass moral judgements is 'part of what he terms being 'comic vicar to the nation''.⁴⁶ It is also Williams' view that the public see religion 'as a very alien, very mysterious, rather malign force, which gives people ideas above their station'.⁴⁷ In addition, the forceful media reaction to Williams' comments on Shari'ah law included the headline: 'He ought to split his church from the state'⁴⁸.

However, there are at least two problems inherent in the attempt to shy away from religious statements. First, as we have mentioned, religious persons have religious reasons, so it is dishonest not to include these. Secondly, as Macmurray points out, the religious or personal life is intimately related to the functional or political life; hence, omitting religious reasons assumes a false and impracticable division of aspects of life into separate spheres.⁴⁹

A Solution

If we are to maintain an integrated life, which supports the development of the human person in a community of persons, personal and functional lives need to be integrated in the manner Macmurray suggests.

Similarly, if church and state are interrelated in the way Macmurray describes, we can establish an ethical place for religious reasons in public debate. Macmurray's argument suggests that politicians should have non-religious reasons for legislation, while religious leaders ought to have religious reasons informing moral judgements, because of their roles in society and because of the proper relation of the personal and functional aspects of life. Nonetheless, as we have seen, Macmurray defines religion as community, rather than a particular set of creedal statements.⁵⁰ In addition, in sympathy with Wolterstorff, we have to

⁴² Frank Kirkpatrick, *John Macmurray: Community Beyond Political Philosophy* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), p. 3.

⁴³ Colin Brown, 'Campbell interrupted Blair as he spoke of his faith: 'We don't do God'', *The Telegraph*, 4 May 2003.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Alan Rusbridger, 'I am comic vicar to the nation', *The Guardian*, 21 March 2006.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Andrew Anthony, 'He ought to split his church from the state', *The Guardian*, 12 February 2008.

⁴⁹ Moreover, the intentional exclusion of religion would be undemocratic and illiberal.

⁵⁰ He states that 'a morally right action is an action which intends community', Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, p. 119.

accept that politicians may have religious reasons, but, in accordance with Macmurray's theory, we should expect religious leaders rather than politicians to concern themselves with the creation and sustenance of community. If Macmurray were able to converse with today's politicians and archbishops then, perhaps he would advise the politicians to leave the language of community to the archbishops, while he would encourage the archbishops to address the negative perception of religion in Britain, by focusing on community.

I would argue that politicians must have secular reasons for legislation, but, if they are religious, their religion may operate as an extra dimension in their reasons. In short, I want to claim that religious reasons *supervene* on secular reasons.⁵¹ I do not think that religious reasons should be included alongside secular reasons in the way that Wolterstorff suggests, but I accept that religious persons cannot avoid having them. Politicians must put forward honest, shared non-religious reasons for their legislation, if they seek to convince others. Politicians ought not to cite God as a reason for action then; however, neither do aides need to prevent Prime Ministers from ever mentioning their religious faith, so long as it is understood to *supervene* on, rather than stand-in for, secular discourse. In my opinion, the notion of supervenience is compatible with Macmurray's account of the role of politics, given that politics is meant to be concerned with society rather than community. Similarly, the media should not be shocked when religious leaders, such as Rowan Williams, 'stand up for the place of . . . religious faith', but neither should religious leaders argue for changes in law based solely on religious grounds.⁵²

Thus, if we agree with Macmurray that community is necessary for human flourishing, but that the state cannot create community, we need to consider how community will be created and sustained. As we have seen, Macmurray expects the church to fulfil this function, but acknowledges that institutionalized Christianity is failing in this respect. Moreover, Britain is both more secular and more religiously diverse now than it was in Macmurray's era. While Macmurray presupposes a predominantly Christian as opposed to a thoroughly religiously diverse Britain; in addition, contemporary Britain is the result of a growing secularity with which Macmurray is equally unfamiliar. Hence, it is both religious diversity and secularity that challenge Macmurray's notion of community. He states that 'religion is, in intention, inclusive of all members of the society to which it refers, and depends on their active co-operation to constitute it'.⁵³ While Christian and other religious communities are common in Britain, religious adherence marks exclusive divisions between groups and excludes the non-religious. Moreover, 'active co-operation' in a non-religious community requires alternative opportunities to those provided by religious rituals.⁵⁴ We have to consider, then, whether it is possible to promote genuine community in contemporary Britain.

In my opinion, contemporary Britain does provide examples of Macmurrarian communities and, moreover, ones that are not tied to a particular religion. Despite Macmurray's assumption in favour of Christian communities, I contend that he would approve of non-religious communities, on the grounds that he defines religion as the

⁵¹ In other words, if two persons have different religious reasons, there must be some difference in their secular reasons (even though they may be able to argue for the same public policy). For some religious persons, religious reasons will be viewed as foundational; for others, religious reasons will be viewed as adding an extra element to and increasing the persuasive force of the secular reasons for those who share their religious views. In either case, I am claiming that the religious reasons *supervene* on the secular reasons.

⁵² Leader, 'Archbishop of Canterbury: Wounded and Wiser', *The Guardian*, 12 February 2008.

⁵³ Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, p. 156.

⁵⁴ With the rise in secularity, it is frequently suggested that football is the new religion. (See BBC News, Stephen Tomkins, 'Matches Made in Heaven', 22 June 2004; Alan Edge, *Faith of Our Fathers: Football as a Religion* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1999). In Macmurrarian terms, membership of a football club is potentially inclusive and it clearly provides the ritualistic element that Macmurray's community requires; nevertheless, it is limited as a Macmurrarian community, since it presupposes antagonism with members of other football clubs, as opposed to encouraging their membership.

celebration of communion rather than the acceptance of a specific set of beliefs. One example of a contemporary non-religious community is the occurrence of and regular meetings working towards the annual celebration of 'Unity Day' in Leeds.⁵⁵ Hyde Park is an area in Leeds encompassing both affluence and poverty; it is culturally and religiously diverse containing several mosques, Christian churches and a Hindu temple; it houses a large number of students alongside families, the elderly and young offenders. Local residents set up Unity Day after the 1995 riots, with the aim of celebrating the 'talent and diversity' of residents in the Leeds 6 postcode area.⁵⁶ Unity Day is an annual celebration of all that is positive in the community, organized entirely by volunteers, it sources local bands, artists and entertainers, packing the park with activities for people of all ages. The success of Unity Day demonstrates that, while the state was failing to establish community in the Leeds 6 area, as we might expect, grass-roots action is proving more effective. Moreover, Unity Day has established community across religious boundaries; it is a secular community which contains diverse religious voices, thus fitting Macmurray's definition of community as fellowship and the sharing of a common life, while overcoming the problems of religious diversity with which Macmurray is largely unfamiliar. In addition, the role of the state in providing the conditions necessary for this community to flourish is that of granting licenses for the use of the park, confirming Macmurray's statement that 'the State is *for* the community; the community is *through* the State'.⁵⁷

Communitarianism and Christianity

Finally, in closing I would like to clarify Macmurray's relation to contemporary communitarianism and traditional Christianity.

Despite his disillusionment with the denominational form Christian churches have taken in the past, Macmurray remains convinced that, through its acknowledgement of previous failures, it is possible for Christianity to become the democratic and revolutionary religion that, he believes, it originally intended to be.⁵⁸ In this respect Macmurray's theory could legitimately be used as a tool for revising Christian theology.⁵⁹ Indeed the emphasis on interpreting the world from a Trinitarian perspective, as found in late twentieth century theology, is not dissimilar to Macmurray's stress on the relational nature of the personal.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, a revised theology that failed to take the severity of Macmurray's attack on organized Christianity into account would not meet his challenge. Traditional perceptions of eschatology, mission, prayer and doctrine, for example, are not supported by Macmurray's thesis. Beyond the rather general assertion concerning the inevitability of the divine intention, Macmurray's theory lacks an eschatology. Similarly, while Macmurray does describe the disciples as a missionary movement and Jesus as having a mission, it is a mission of care, advancing freedom and equality rather than seeking conversions. Moreover, doctrine must be kept to a minimum, if religion is to be adaptable and inclusive rather than outdated and exclusive.⁶¹ Hence as Duncan explains, Macmurray is making a distinction between religious belief and religious faith; the former involves assenting to particular creeds or dogmas, while

⁵⁵ There are many similar community groups across the UK. Unity Day is a particularly fitting example however, since it has unity as its focus and it is a non-exclusive community (in the sense that all residents and others are welcome participants), unlike an artistic or music-based community.

⁵⁶ See www.unityday.org.uk

⁵⁷ Macmurray, 'The Community of Mankind', 856 (original italics).

⁵⁸ Macmurray, *A Challenge to the Churches*, pp. 42-7.

⁵⁹ Fergusson uses Macmurray in this way (see D. A. S. Fergusson, 'Towards a Theology of the Personal', in P. McEnhill and G. B. Hall, eds, *Festschrift for D.W.D. Shaw* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1997), pp. 105-18.

⁶⁰ Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, trans. M. Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981).

⁶¹ In this respect Macmurray's attitude is similar to the approach taken by non-foundationalism (cf. J. E. Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

the latter involves a positive attitude of mind.⁶² Doctrines are, Macmurray maintains, essentially vague and unhelpful; however, the ecumenical movement is, he suggests, a solid foundation for a freely united Christian church.⁶³ Nevertheless, Macmurray refrains from making any assertions concerning the divinity of Jesus Christ; he merely asserts that Jesus is a Hebrew prophet and an exceptional figure. In spite of Macmurray's attempt to insist on the uniqueness of Jesus' understanding of positive personal relationships, his account lends itself to comparisons with other great social activists, such as Gandhi and Mandela.

Furthermore, it could be argued that Macmurray's use of the term 'religion' is somewhat opaque. Although Macmurray employs the concept of God to act as a unifying principle over time, he admits that God is 'at most ... a necessary hypothesis'.⁶⁴ It would be perfectly consistent with Macmurray's account, therefore, for someone to have a religious attitude – namely to seek community – without holding any mainstream religious beliefs. For Macmurray, it is ritual rather than shared belief that retains a pivotal location in the effort to maintain community.

However, while the term community has become commonplace in political circles, it is not being used in the way Macmurray intended. The focus on community in government rhetoric is similar to the contemporary communitarianism that Amitai Etzioni expounds.⁶⁵ That is, political communitarians emphasize the community over and above the individual. In government policy covenants and contracts are central; such that duties and responsibilities have to be fulfilled in order for rights to be granted. (For example, the 'right' to unemployment benefit is granted only if the duties to train for, apply for and take jobs are fulfilled.) Yet, for Macmurray, responsibility is not something you owe or are required to perform in order to access benefits; rather, responsibility is exercised when persons recognize the extent to which their actions affect and limit the actions of others and, therefore, avoid acting so as to curtail another's freedom to act. Macmurray uses the term community to refer to unconditional relationships of care and concern for the welfare of others, including their economic welfare. Thus, Macmurray advocates community but is not a communitarian, and, moreover, a Macmurrarian community is not compatible with the current coalition government's cuts to welfare funding and the over-emphasis on individual responsibility in David Cameron's 'big society'.

There are numerous religious communities working hard to fill the gap left by the closure of day care centres and the reduction of disability benefits, and their work is highly commendable, but without funding and resources it will not be possible for these organizations to provide for all persons in need. In taking up the language of community, it seems that that government has yet to grasp the meaning of Macmurray's statement that 'the State is *for* the community; the community is *through* the State'.

⁶² A. R.C. Duncan, *On the Nature of Persons* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 123-7 and A. R. C. Duncan, 'Macmurray's Religious Philosophy', *Chapman*, 73 (1993), 82-9.

⁶³ John Macmurray, *Religion, Art and Science* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1961), pp. 71-2; John Macmurray, *To Save From Fear* (London: Friends Home Service Committee, 1964). Although the World Council of Churches and the British Council of Churches are moves in the right direction, for Macmurray they are overly constrained by doctrinal formula (see John Macmurray, *Search for Reality in Religion* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1965), pp. 64-9). For this reason Macmurray joined the Society of Friends (see *ibid.*, pp. 63-75 and John Macmurray, 'Friends and the Ecumenical Movement', typescript, 1963/4, The John Macmurray Special Collection, Regis College Library, Toronto: Item 64.4).

⁶⁴ 'Letter to Richard Roberts, 22 July 1925', MS, The John Macmurray Special Collection, Regis College Library, Toronto: Item 36.5.

⁶⁵ Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community* (London: Fontana Press, 1995).