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**THE RECONCILIATION OF RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR REASONS
AS A FORM OF EPISTEMIC OPENNESS:
INSIGHTS FROM EXAMPLES IN THE PHILIPPINES**

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Abstract

Addressing the debate inspired by John Rawls's restrictive idea of the political role of religion, Jürgen Habermas proposes the institutional translation proviso as an alternative that corrects an overly secularist notion of the state. Maeve Cooke has suggested that religious arguments can be allowed without translation in the institutional level as long as they are non-authoritarian. However, her definition of non-authoritarianism requires an acceptance of the fallibility of the truths acquired by faith, which I argue to be unnecessary. Instead, I propose that non-authoritarianism is realized in the recognition of the reconcilability of religious and secular reasons. I demonstrate the viability of this form of non-authoritarianism using particular examples in the Philippine context. I conclude that these attempts realize an alternative form of epistemic openness to the more stringent forms that Habermas and Cooke had proposed.

I. Introduction

In his recent essays on religion, Jürgen Habermas has turned attention to the 'precarious demarcations' that have to be negotiated in light of the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state, and the state's guarantee of freedom of religion.¹ He is speaking in particular about the context of the United States, where in contrast to the European models, the secularization of the state was adopted not to protect citizens from being forced to adhere to a certain religion against their conscience. Instead, the separation of church and state ensures that citizens are able to practice their religion as they deem appropriate. The dynamics between these negative and positive liberties with regard to religion as provided by the constitution is the context within which he undertakes his inquiry about the appropriate political role for religion.²

In the Philippines, this separation of the church and state, which it had adopted from the constitution of the United States, has been most recently put to the fore by the debate on the reproductive health bill, now ratified as the 'Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012' (R.A. 10354). This issue, along with several others, has seen an active engagement by members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), and other religious groups. These religious actors, as well as non-religious civil society members, have been resolute in responding to political issues through different forms of advocacy, including public statements, public letters to the president and newspaper articles.

In this paper, I examine the institutional translation proviso proposed by Habermas and discuss the question of the political role of religion from the Philippine context. I begin by highlighting the development of Habermas's institutional translation proviso as a response to Nicolas Wolterstorff's objection to John Rawls's proviso. I pose the question of whether Habermas's proviso has been an adequate response to this objection, particularly drawing on Maeve Cooke's critique of the postmetaphysical assumptions of Habermas's proviso, and her notion of non-authoritarian religious argumentation. I propose an alternative definition of non-authoritarianism as an openness to and recognition of the reconcilability of religious and secular reasons, and demonstrate its viability using specific examples from the Philippines.

II. Habermas on the political role of religion in a liberal state

In 'Religion in the Public Sphere', Habermas addresses the debate on the appropriate political role of religion that was prompted by John Rawls's theory on the public use of reason and his ethics of citizenship. He begins by highlighting the liberal conception of the constitutional state that he shares with Rawls. Habermas explains that the self-understanding of a liberal state has the underlying assumption of a common human reason. It is through an appeal to this natural reason that the state is able to articulate and defend a constitution that has general accessibility to all citizens, regardless of their worldview. This appeal for general accessibility has replaced the religious legitimation of the

state, which has proved to be untenable in the context of early modern wars. The principle of general accessibility is institutionalized in the secular character of the state.³ As the appropriate response to the conflicts in the advent of religious pluralism, the secularity of the state is, under the liberal conception, what guarantees religious freedom by preventing any action by the state that favors any particular religious tradition.⁴

Both Rawls and Habermas adopt a distinction between the formal and informal public sphere. The formal public sphere refers to the political institutions which function to formulate and justify laws. On the other hand, the informal public sphere refers to the public political discussions in which citizens can engage. The importance of secularity in the liberal state informs the political virtues expected of its citizens in the informal public sphere. In public debates, citizens are to provide each other compelling, that is, generally accessible, reasons, in view of their commitment to the secular state that guarantees their religious freedom and safeguards them from religious conflicts.⁵

Rawls has proposed a proviso to be followed for the use of comprehensive doctrines in public discourses. Rawls describes it as such:

[R]easonable comprehensive doctrines, religious or non-religious, may be introduced in public political discussion at any time, provided that in due course proper political reasons – and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrines – are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines are said to support. This injunction to present proper political reasons I refer to as *the proviso*.⁶

Under Rawls's requirement, comprehensive doctrines – doctrines that are particular to a worldview, be it religious or secular – must in effect be superseded by 'proper political reasons.' While religious reasons may be given for an argument in public discourses, the need for the sufficiency of political reasons to support the same argument implies that religious reasons will have to be replaced. As Habermas interprets the proviso, political reasons that are eventually presented cannot simply be given as "pretext," but must "count" irrespective of the religious context in which they are embedded.⁷ Generally acceptable reasons must be sufficient in themselves such that there is no more need at that point to consider the religious context to gain justification.

The subject of Habermas's inquiry is whether such a strict proviso imposes unjust burdens upon religious citizens. As guaranteed in its liberal self-understanding, the state that has renounced religious legitimation must instead seek a different kind of legitimation that relies on a democratic process of forming its constitution, facilitated by the use of generally acceptable reasons. If the democratic process is to be considered successful, citizens should be able to see themselves 'to be the authors of laws to which they are subject as addressees.'⁸ While Habermas shares the concern that an overly secularist state may result in an unjust and restrictive notion of the political role of religion, he is also wary of how certain critics impinge upon the liberal self-understanding, particularly the secular character of the state. He will thus attempt to find the middle ground that rightly amends the overly secularist notion of the state but at the same time preserves its liberal self-understanding.⁹

III. Wolterstorff's objection to Rawls, and Habermas's response

Habermas holds that acts of participation from citizens can only be considered to have political consequences if these acts are able to influence the 'cognitive motivation of *some* decision (backed and implemented by state power).'¹⁰ We can further presume that citizen participation by means of engaging in public discourses aims at influencing the intended products of these discourses – the laws enacted by the state. Thus, the question of justice becomes inevitable when speaking of the laws that the state is justified in implementing. In light of this, Wolterstorff's claim merits consideration:

It belongs to the *religious convictions* of a good many religious people in our society that *they ought to base* their decisions concerning fundamental issues of justice *on* their religious convictions. They do not view it as an option whether or not to do so. It is their conviction that they ought to strive for wholeness, integrity, integration, in their lives: that they ought to allow the Word of God, the teachings of the Torah, the command and example of Jesus, or whatever, to shape their existence as a whole, including, then, their social and political existence. Their religion is not, for them, about *something other* than their social and political existence; it is *also* about their social and political existence.¹¹

Wolterstorff's argument is that many religious people hold that their religious convictions must inform the entirety of their lives, including their social and political existence. Religion for them is not limited to particular spaces or private aspects of living, and neither is it exclusively a belief in a higher

being or a set of traditions and foundational texts. Rather, religion is something that bears a truth that has a meaning for their whole existence, and has deep implications for how they carry out their private and public lives.

From this point of view, a distinction between religious and secular spaces or even concepts appears superficial. For instance, both religious and secular citizens may ground their political positions on notions of social justice and equal human rights. On their own, these concepts may be considered secular. However, Catholics may hold these concepts to be founded on Catholic social teaching, which in turn is anchored upon the religious concept of the dignity of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God. In this case, their use of seemingly secular concepts are in fact integrated with and rooted in their religious beliefs. Furthermore, based on Wolterstorff's claim, this integration is not coincidental, but born out of a compelling desire to live out a faith that brings coherence to their lives.

The emphasis on the crucial role of religion in the lives of believers is central to an objection made by Wolterstorff against Rawls that Habermas concedes to be valid. The objection is that if Rawls's proviso is to be followed, many religious people would be prevented from living out what Habermas calls 'genuine faith' that informs and sustains their whole lives.¹² Such an imposition would run counter to the promise of the religious freedom that justifies the secularity of the liberal state. Habermas states that it is wrong to 'infer from the secular character of the state a direct personal obligation on all citizens to supplement their publicly expressed religious convictions by equivalents in a generally accessible language.'¹³ His acceptance of Wolterstorff's objection informs his proposal of the institutional translation proviso:

If we accept this, to my mind compelling, objection, then the liberal state, which expressly protects such forms of existence as a basic right cannot at the same time expect *all* citizens in addition to justify their political positions independently of their religious convictions or worldviews. This strict demand can only be made of politicians operating within state institutions who have a duty to remain neutral among competing worldviews.¹⁴

What Habermas proposes is an alternative proviso to be enacted at the institutional threshold, or the threshold between the informal and formal public sphere. In light of the understanding of the

profound impact of faith in all aspects of the life of the believers, Habermas suggests that the 'strict demand' for the exclusive use of non-religious reasons only be imposed upon politicians, that is, those occupying positions in the formal public sphere. With regard to this demand, Habermas offers no modifications to Rawls's proviso in terms of its requirement for political reasons to 'count' regardless of the religious context from which they originated. Instead, what Habermas does is to limit its application to the formal public sphere since he recognizes that applying it to the informal public sphere is unnecessary and unjust to religious citizens.¹⁵

In Habermas's translation proviso, religious citizens are no longer required, in the informal public sphere, to justify their arguments independently of their religious beliefs. However, at the institutional threshold, religious arguments must eventually be secularized whether by religious or secular citizens, in the process of cooperative translation. This is because Habermas concedes that certain religious citizens may not be able to nor wish to translate their religious reasons into secular reasons. Moreover, it would be unfair to these citizens to prevent their participation in the public sphere on the basis that they could only employ religious language in their argumentation. Habermas further holds that these citizens whom he calls 'monolingual' will still see themselves as part of a *civitas terrena* that allows their participation, having been allowed to make political positions despite arguing for these with religious reasons.¹⁶

With regard to the secularity of the formal public sphere, Habermas argues that the preservation of the self-understanding is in the interest of both secular and religious citizens. In developing the institutional translation proviso, he reiterates the requirement for secularization as a precondition for religious freedom, and by extension, the equal participation for religious and secular citizens. Habermas further states that the unfair bias against religious citizens is lifted by removing the unnecessary requirement for translation within the informal public sphere, and deferring it to the institutional threshold.¹⁷

Under the translation proviso, religious arguments must be translated if they are to move beyond the informal public sphere, but the translation need not be done by the originator of the

argument. Habermas returns to the notion of the legally unenforceable attitude of respect, manifested in the shared realization of the citizens that they are to give one another compelling reasons for their arguments in the public sphere. Based also on this attitude of respect, secular citizens or citizens of other faiths may cooperate with the originator of the argument in the process of translation. In this way, equal participation among citizens, especially among the believers is achieved, particularly by removing the unnecessary burden previously imposed by the Rawlsian proviso. At the same time, the requirement for translation at the institutional threshold preserves the liberal self-understanding of the state.¹⁸

IV. An appraisal of Habermas's translation proviso

Habermas holds that he has adequately responded to Wolterstorff's objection. Indeed, one can have the impression that the requirement of secularity does not affect citizens who do not hold public office. However, Habermas himself emphasizes that the acceptance of the secular character of the state is required of all citizens.¹⁹ This emphasis is warranted by the requirement that all religious reasons must eventually be translated at the institutional threshold. Even if the less restrictive proviso proposed by Habermas allows for religious reasons to be introduced to a public discourse, the fact that they eventually have to be secularized (whether by religious citizens themselves or in a cooperative effort with secular citizens) is undoubtedly founded on the secular character of the state. Thus, religious citizens must still recognize secularity as one of the core premises of the state to which they belong. As we shall see, the requirements imposed on religious citizens to arrive at this recognition are quite exacting, and will invite the question of whether Habermas has adequately addressed Wolterstorff's objection.

By stating that both religious and secular citizens bear corresponding burdens in the cooperative task of translation, Habermas offers a response to the charge that the liberal state imposes an asymmetrical burden on religious citizens. He says of the religious citizens that they must develop a stance that responds to religious pluralism, modern science, legal and secular morality. In order to

demonstrate the symmetry of the burdens imposed by his proviso, he presents a corresponding epistemic stance that needs to be assumed by secular citizens – the need to be open to religion as a source of meaningful arguments that are worthy of translation into secular terms.²⁰

Expounding upon the demands of the liberal state on the part of religious citizens, Habermas identifies certain epistemic stances that religious citizens are to develop under the translation proviso. These epistemic attitudes or stances reflect an effort to learn and adapt in response ‘to the challenges posed by the fact of religious pluralism, the emergence of modern science, and the spread of positive law and secular morality.’²¹

The first epistemic stance is ‘toward other religions and worldviews that they encounter within a universe of discourse hitherto occupied only by their own religion.’ Religious citizens must accept the reality that they coexist in a society with citizens of other valid worldviews. They must, in a self-reflexive manner, learn to relate their own beliefs to other competing beliefs about salvation. The second epistemic stance is ‘toward the internal logic of secular knowledge and toward the institutionalized monopoly on knowledge of modern scientific experts.’ The progress attained by secular means in the search for knowledge must not conflict with the articles of their faith. The final epistemic stance is ‘toward the priority that secular reasons enjoy in the political arena.’ This openness to other belief systems, the scientific nature of knowledge, and the privileging of secular reasons in the public sphere make the learning process possible on the part of religious citizens. This learning process in turn makes peaceful, democratic coexistence possible among citizens.²²

In an attempt to assess this, I return to Wolterstorff’s claim that many religious people strive for integration in their lives, and apply this to the required epistemic stances as defined by Habermas. I agree as Habermas does that this claim forms a compelling objection to Rawls’s proviso. However, I find Habermas’s response to this objection inadequate.²³ In light of Wolterstorff’s position that many religious people have a desire for the integration of their social and political lives as not separate from their religious selves, it is unclear how they can come to terms with Habermas’s requirements. To require them to accept a monopoly of science on the truth and the privileging of secular reasons over

religious reasons runs counter to a faith that informs all aspects of the believer's life, a faith that Habermas himself has described as having a 'seat' in the believer's life.²⁴ A monopoly on truth held by scientific and secular means cannot be compatible with such an overarching view of faith.

In light of this, the claim that the religious citizen sees himself as part of the *civitas terrena*, and as co-author of laws is questionable, because Habermas has not allowed for the possibility of religious integration at the institutional level but merely appeals to the liberal self-understanding of the state that grounds the secularity of democratic institutions.

As discussed earlier, Habermas concedes the integration argument by Wolterstorff as compelling, but does not remove the Rawlsian proviso at the institutional level. This can be seen in that he does not refute Rawls's requirement that only political reasons must remain once the proviso is implemented, and that political decisions are to be made on the basis of the sufficiency of these political reasons. What Habermas has introduced is the idea of a cooperative translation under which religious reasons can be translated into political reasons, that is, compelling reasons that must be acceptable regardless of the religious context in which they may have originated. It remains to be seen however, how the integration as put forward by Wolterstorff can be possible once the formal public sphere is considered. By the very definition of 'political' and 'compelling' reasons as provided in Rawls's proviso, and which Habermas does not refute, the proviso and religious integration appear to be incompatible.

The question then follows: Is it enough to claim that burdens arise for both religious and secular citizens to prove that the liberal state treats both kinds equally? Moreover, is Habermas justified in claiming that religious citizens 'nevertheless understand themselves as members of a *civitas terrena*, which empowers them to be authors of laws to which they are subject as addressees?'²⁵ Or perhaps a contradiction is beginning to surface between the secularization requirement and the goal to include religious citizens in the public sphere?

Habermas begins his defense of the institutional translation proviso with this proposition: 'Foregoing reciprocity and mutual indifference seems to be justified by the fact that the liberal state

contradicts itself if it demands that all citizens conform to a political ethos that imposes unequal cognitive burdens on them.' If an asymmetrical burden is found to be imposed on religious citizens wishing to participate in the political sphere, the liberal state will have contradicted its self-understanding. Habermas seeks to avoid the imposition of an asymmetrical burden by speaking of a mutual learning process, and corresponding epistemic stances that are expected of secular citizens. In so doing, he concludes that the liberal state does not contradict itself in the way he had described.²⁶

With regard to the learning process to be undergone by secular citizens, Habermas introduces his take on postmetaphysical thinking as the philosophical expression of the post-secular society, which by means of self-reflexivity has grown aware of the limits of an overly secularist attitude that dismisses religion. Postmetaphysical thinking, while it 'refrains from making ontological pronouncements on the constitution of being,' does not adhere either to a radical naturalism that rejects anything that cannot be explained by empirical bases, causal relationships or natural law. On the contrary, it is able to appropriately use the scientific knowledge which allows for our complete understanding of the world, while remaining open to moral, legal and religious statements.²⁷

V. Cooke's critique of Habermas and alternative proposal

Through a critique of postmetaphysical thinking, Maeve Cooke sets up her main objection against Habermas. She notes: 'Evidently, there is a potential tension here between the plurality of types of reasons that are deemed appropriate in political discourses, the alleged lack of general acceptability of some of these types of reasons, and the posited link between political validity and general acceptability.'²⁸ What Cooke highlights here is that despite its claim of a greater openness to multiple kinds of reasons, particularly religious reasons, there is an incompatibility that arises due to the rejection by postmetaphysical thinking of transcendence and transcendent thinking in a metaphysical, otherworldly sense. Postmetaphysical thinking does admit and in fact depend on a different kind of context-transcendence, whose reference point for its validity claims is something internal to human practices and human history. In this sense, the context-transcendence is not

metaphysical but ‘innerworldly’ or ‘transcendence from within.’ By contrast, transcendence for religious citizens is unavoidably ‘otherworldly.’²⁹ There is then a huge disconnect between the way religious citizens establish the validity of truth claims and the validity that postmetaphysical thought deems acceptable. This is evident in the fact that Habermas ‘rules out the possibility of public *assessment* of the truth of religious validity claims.’³⁰

Like Habermas, Cooke regards the secular state as a historical achievement. While Cooke agrees with Habermas about the merits of secularization as a historical achievement, Cooke insists that precisely because of its historicity, it must remain open-ended and be modified as new events and challenges unfold. Thus, secularization can be recognized for its merits without dismissing the possibility that its reassessment is in order. Cooke considers the ‘non-authoritarian approach to truth and knowledge’ to be one of the great contributions of Habermas’s theory on public discourse and it is this aspect that must be consciously preserved during its reevaluation. This non-authoritarian approach allows for participants to engage in ‘open-ended, inclusive, and fair processes of argumentation in which participants are motivated by the search for the single right answer.’³¹

Based on this, Cooke proposes an alternative that aims to achieve what Habermas’s translation requirement fails to do. She notes that the flaw of his translation requirement lies on its failure to distinguish between religious arguments that are authoritarian and those that are non-authoritarian. The distinction she makes is in an epistemological sense. Authoritarian claims assume that they can and do possess a knowledge of truth that is independent of language, context and argumentation. Non-authoritarian claims, on the other hand, acknowledge the need for these mediating factors in order to arrive at knowledge of the truth. Although Cooke does not directly deal with the epistemic stances I discussed earlier, her proposal can be viewed as an alternative to these epistemic stances. Similar to Habermas, Cooke presents her proposal as a shift in the perspective of religious citizens that results in a willingness to provide reasons for one’s positions and to subject these positions to ‘critical interrogation.’³²

Cooke further restates the difference between the two kinds of religious claims in this way:

[T]he interpretations differ in their views of what kind of *knowledge* of truth is available to human beings. In the first case, final knowledge is held to be available; this is what I refer to as an epistemologically authoritarian position. In the second case, only fallible knowledge is held to be available; this is what I refer to as an epistemologically non-authoritarian position.³³

Through the introduction of the distinction between the ways we experience and receive religious truths, and the way in which we can critically examine them, Cooke grounds her proposal for the inclusion of religious reasons into the formal public sphere. Since the experience of truths in a religious, ‘otherworldly’ manner does not prevent one from reflexively examining them, we can accordingly allow and use religious reasons in the formal public sphere as long as believers agree to refrain from being dogmatic or authoritarian about them. However, adopting this kind of reflexivity requires them to admit a fallibility in the knowledge which they acquire through faith.³⁴

VI. A different take on non-authoritarianism

Cooke concedes the stringency of her proposal, but holds that this is not enough to constitute an objection.³⁵ I agree with Cooke in the distinction that she makes between authoritarian and non-authoritarian beliefs to allow for a greater inclusion of non-authoritarian religious arguments in the public sphere. However, I would like to propose a less stringent formulation of the non-authoritarianism requirement that I believe can stand as an alternative to Habermas’s epistemic stances that I earlier critiqued. My purpose in this paper is not to refute the merits of Cooke’s proposal, particularly in achieving her goal of a wider acceptance of religion in the public sphere. However, I hold that because of the stringency of Cooke’s proposal, a valid and at the same time less stringent proposal would prove more viable than hers.

I revisit Wolterstorff’s claim that many religious people desire an integration between their religious convictions and how they live their lives, a desire that extends to their participation in the social and political sphere. My view is that the same movement of desire for integration also motivates religious people to integrate their knowledge of truth gained through faith with the knowledge made available to them by scientific and other secular means. In light of the changes brought about by

modernization, religious people, through their commitment to their faith, can properly adapt by establishing a harmony between their religious knowledge and secular knowledge. This is similar in a sense to Habermas's view that religious people must develop an epistemic stance toward secular knowledge. However, it differs from him significantly in proposing that this epistemic stance is better achieved not by acknowledging a 'monopoly' or primacy of secular knowledge, but in the acknowledgement of the reconcilability of religious knowledge with secular knowledge.

I also agree with Cooke's notion of the importance of world-disclosure as a means by which religious people arrive at knowledge.³⁶ However, given the centrality of world-disclosure in religious life, it would not be viable to impose a non-authoritarian stance that requires religious people to admit a fallibility in the knowledge which they gained by faith.

In view of these differences from both Habermas and Cooke, I suggest a modified formulation of the non-authoritarian stance put forward by the latter. I propose that religious citizens can assume a non-authoritarian stance by seeking an integration of religious reasons with secular reasons in the process of argumentation within the public sphere. This movement of argumentation recognizes that secular reasons are not only reconcilable with religious reasons, but also valuable in justifying their political positions. From the point of view of secular citizens and citizens of different religious traditions, this already represents an effort to provide compelling reasons to one another. As Habermas has noted, the willingness to provide reasons for one's positions is one of the political virtues to be expected from citizens.³⁷

The epistemic stance can now be modified to be more open to this kind of religious integration – particularly in emphasizing the reconcilability of secular reasons with religious reasons, and not the primacy of the former. In particular, the epistemic stances required of religious citizens can be formulated in an unbiased way that does not jeopardize the practice of their faith.

VII. Religion and politics in the Philippines

Habermas observes that in established liberal states, religious communities have come to play a pivotal role in advancing a liberal political culture.³⁸ Jens Köhrsen, however, refutes this observation. He gives the example of the absence of religious language in press statements made by the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Church of England. He observes that while religious groups actively engage in the public sphere, no references to God or any other religious concepts are made in their public communication. This prompts him to assert the secularity of so-called religious participation in the public sphere.³⁹

In this section, I turn to some examples from the Philippines, in part because they run contrary to the observation Köhrsen has made in Western Europe. These examples could therefore shed more light on the crucial political role of religious communities that Habermas has put forward. More importantly, I use these examples to argue, first of all, that religious citizens can and should be allowed to develop an epistemic stance that I previously described toward scientific and secular reasons as a valid source of knowledge – without discounting the importance they place on religious reasons. Secondly, I also argue that religious citizens must be allowed to present religious reasons when proposed laws have implications on the positive and negative liberties relating to religion, that is, when it runs the danger of impinging on their religious freedom. These examples serve to show that Habermas's requirement of translation at the institutional threshold is not necessary. Moreover, they also show that neither is the admission of fallibility that Cooke insists upon, necessary. What they do demonstrate is an attempt to integrate religious reasons with secular reasons. They serve to highlight that religious reasons can be used with an openness to secular reasons, by recognizing them as sources of truth and knowledge that can supplement religious reasons if necessary. Argumentation made in this way in the public sphere should not be impeded by an unnecessary proviso for translation. I conclude that instead of a rigid epistemic stance that prevents integration by privileging secular reasons, a new epistemic stance should be called for that allows integration by using religious reasons along with other kinds of reasons in argumentation, even in the formal public sphere.

In November 2013, 21 bishops of the Catholic ecclesiastical province of Manila, Philippines wrote to the president to oppose the plans for the further reclamation of Manila Bay. The letter presents scientific, legal and moral bases for their argument, but culminates in an overarching religious claim based on the Bible and Catholic social teaching. First, the bishops cite two consultant geologists whose study of the Manila Bay Reclamation Project revealed that it would introduce geological hazards, as well as increase the risk of storm surges and liquefaction during earthquakes. Second, they oppose the project on the legal grounds that a Presidential Proclamation has prohibited the use of the Manila Bay area for commercial or residential purposes. Third, they cite that the Manila Bay is within the territory of wetlands of international importance, making it the responsibility of the state to preserve it from sale or settlement.⁴⁰ Finally, their argument culminates in the following:

The scientific, legal and moral basis of our opposition for the reclamation of Manila Bay echoes God's message. The Scriptures tell us in the Book of Genesis that after creating the heavens, the earth, the sea, and man and woman, 'God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good' (Gen 1:31). ... Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI elaborated on this in his own 2010 World Day of Peace message, 'If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation.'

At the heart of Catholic social teaching is the concept of the Common Good. This is what should guide us in our decision regarding the Reclamation project. So we ask, 'who stands to benefit from this project?'⁴¹

This integration of scientific, legal and moral bases with religious teaching demonstrates an epistemic stance that recognizes the reconcilability of these different forms of reasoning. The integration of these reasons already constitutes the appropriate and open response of religion to modern science, positive law and secular morality.

To push for unnecessarily translating these religious reasons despite the adequacy of this response runs the danger of falling into an overly secularist demand that Habermas has sought to remedy. To follow Habermas's suggestion that religious citizens must acknowledge the 'institutionalized monopoly on knowledge of modern scientific experts' – insofar as it excludes religion as a valid source of knowledge – will prevent any effort that could possibly lead toward the integration of religious reasons with scientific, legal and moral reasons that is demonstrated above.

It is true that the arguments put forward by the letter can be secularized, and can in fact stand by remaining at its scientific, legal and moral bases. The appeal to protect creation can also be 'translated' as an appeal to 'protect the environment.' Furthermore, the concept of the common good can be invoked without the mention of Catholic social teaching. However, this stringent requirement for secularization will render impossible the integration of religious reasons with scientific, legal and moral reasons that this letter has accomplished.

Moreover, it is possible to attribute the persuasiveness of the pastoral letter's argument precisely to the integration of these reasons. Their integration demonstrates a rigor and a coherence in the argumentation of the letter that can be appreciated not just by religious people of the same faith, but to those of other confessions and those who are secular. That the letter culminates in tying up the arguments to religious reasons also functions as an appeal that their motivation is primarily religious and thus, well meaning. This appeal can be appreciated even within the context of a dialogue with other religions and worldviews.

Without its references to the Bible, to nature as God's creation and to Catholic social teaching, the bishops' letter loses its Catholic character. If religious reasons, along with scientific reasons motivated the political stance, why should institutions need to filter out the most important and compelling reasons from those who originated that stance? More importantly, divorced from these reasons, will the argument's stand remain as powerful?

That the bishops intersperse religious and secular reasons in their letter reveals something about the nature of Catholic social teaching. Catholic social teaching carries both religious and secular articulations in its principles. For instance, the principles of the dignity of the human person and stewardship of creation are found alongside the principles of the common good and equal political participation. Take for instance, Pope Francis's discussion of trickle-down economic theories in *Evangelii Gaudium*. He begins his criticism by problematizing the failed assumptions of the free market and the lack of empirical evidence that supports its claims:

In this context, some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about

greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system.⁴²

This argument is found interspersed with an appeal to the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ by stating that this economy of exclusion, in fact, kills. The Pope further appeals against the new idolatry of money.⁴³ As a religious document, the Pope would not have included this critique on a secular issue if it did not run counter to religious teachings.

Another debate in Philippine Society that has been more polarizing is on the issue of reproductive health. The issue has been protracted from the filing of the Reproductive Health (RH) Bill in 2010 until the passing into law of Republic Act No. 10354 or the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act in April 2014. These included debates on the distinction (or a lack thereof) between abortifacient and non-abortifacient contraception, the inclusion of sexual education in the curriculum, and the allocation of taxes for reproductive health measures. It prompted many religious groups as well as other civil society groups to speak out in various venues in the political sphere, and to produce political statements supporting or opposing the RH Bill.

In July 2010, two Jesuit institutions, the Loyola School of Theology and the John J. Carroll Institute on Church and Social Issues, released a document called ‘Talking Points for Dialogue on RH Bill 96’. It sought to promote fruitful discourses among the many opposing views by discussing ‘talking points and proposals for dialogue and negotiation on the objectionable portions of the Bill.’ In its final paragraph, it employs what can be considered a fusion of religious and secular language:

For things pertaining to protecting human life and dignity, we need to come to a consensus for the common good; for things that can be left to individual decisions without violating human life and dignity, we need to respect freedom of conscience of every Filipino both Catholics and non-Catholics; in all our discussions, we need to speak and act with charity and understanding as members of the same human family and community.⁴⁴

Their document represents an attempt at an integration of religious and secular reasons representative of an open epistemic stance toward the challenges of the modern world. Moreover, it presents an example of a response to a proposed law that potentially impinges upon their religious freedom. One of the document’s concerns is how the requirement upon employers to provide reproductive health

services (including contraceptives) to their employees should be removed from the proposal. They note that “[t]o enforce this requirement would be a violation of the conscience of Catholic employers.”⁴⁵ This demonstrates the point that religious citizens must be allowed to present religious reasons when proposed laws have implications on the positive and negative liberties relating to religion.

VIII. Conclusion

This paper has argued that it is possible for religious citizens to display an epistemic openness and non-authoritarian response to the challenges of the modern world by their continued attempts at reconciling religious reasons with secular ones. The epistemic stances as proposed by Habermas should be modified to be more open to this kind of religious integration. In particular, the epistemic stances required of religious citizens can be formulated in an unbiased way that does not jeopardize the practice of their faith. Instead of being asked to privilege secular reasons, religious citizens can instead be expected to accept the merits of secular reasons and their means of arriving at the truth, without jeopardizing the merits and primacy of their religion as their source of and link to what they consider the most profound, compelling truths.

Notes

I thank Dr. Ranilo B. Hermida and Dr. Jacklyn A. Cleofas for their invaluable comments on this article. I am also grateful to the John J. Carroll Institute on Church and Social Issues, my work for which has spurred several of my reflections included here.

1 Jürgen Habermas, ‘Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the “Public Use of Reason” by Religious and Secular Citizens’ in *Between Religion and Naturalism: Philosophical Essays*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 114-147; Habermas, ‘Notes on Post-Secular Society,’ *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2008): 17-29, doi:10.1111/j.1540-5842.2008.01017.x; Habermas, “‘The Political’: The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology,’ in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, eds. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 15-33.

2 Habermas, ‘Religion in the Public Sphere,’ 118.

3 Maeve Cooke has critiqued Habermas for using the terms ‘secular’ and ‘generally accessible’ interchangeably. While my paper does not interrogate this aspect of Habermas’s theory, this point serves to better explain why for Habermas, the need for generally accessible language in light of religious pluralism is also the basis for the secularity of the state. Cooke, ‘A Secular State for a Postsecular Society? Postmetaphysical Political Theory and the Place of Religion,’ *Constellations: An International Journal Of*

Critical And Democratic Theory 14, no. 2 (2007): 230.

4 Habermas, 'Religion in the Public Sphere,' 120.

5 Ibid., 121.

6 John Rawls, 'The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,' *University of College Law Review* 64, no. 3 (1997): 783-784.

7 Habermas, 'Religion in the Public Sphere,' 123.

8 Ibid., 130.

9 Apart from proposing a modification of Rawls's theory, this attempt also marks a shift in Habermas's thought, which is usually divided into three stages. In the early 1980s, having been heavily influenced by the Frankfurt School and Marxist theory, Habermas considered religion as an alienating tool used by those in power. Thus, Habermas lobbied for its disappearance. Then, beginning in 1985, Habermas modifies this into a call for its privatization, recognizing that it is indispensable for some as a source of consolation. Finally, in the late 1990s, the evolution of Habermas's thought shifted towards his most recent proposal, a notion of 'publicization' of religion and religious arguments, one that will tap into the capability of religion to refine discussions on 'moral intuitions.' Philippe Portier, 'Religion and Democracy in the Thought of Jürgen Habermas,' *Society* 48, no. 5 (2011): 426, doi:10.1007/s12115-011-9470-3.

10 Habermas, 'Religion in the Public Sphere,' 126.

11 Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'The Role of Religion in Decision and Discussion of Political Issues,' in Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square: the Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate* (Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 105.

12 Habermas, 'Religion in the Public Sphere,' 127.

13 Ibid., 129.

14 Ibid., 128.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., 130-131.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 129.

20 Ibid., 136-139.

21 Ibid., 136.

22 Ibid., 137.

23 In Wolterstorff's essay, he acknowledges Habermas's engagement of his earlier objection. However, the focus of his interrogation of Habermas's translation requirement is its foundation in postmetaphysical thinking. He holds that no body of thought currently satisfies the postmetaphysical requirement of 'Kant-rationality,' which he defines as the acceptability of a body of thought whose assumptions all beings would agree to as long as certain conditions are met. The example he provides is the thought of Habermas himself, which has been met with active opposition. Wolterstorff, 'An Engagement with Jürgen Habermas on Postmetaphysical Philosophy, Religion, and Political Dialogue,' in *Habermas and Religion*, eds. Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), Kindle edition, part I, chapter 4.

24 Habermas, 'Religion in the Public Sphere,' 127.

25 Ibid., 130.

26 Ibid., 136.

27 Ibid., 140-141.

28 Cooke, 'Salvaging and Secularizing the Semantic Contents of Religion: The Limitations of Habermas's Postmetaphysical Proposal,' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 60 (2006): 197, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27646187>.

29 Ibid., 188.

30 Ibid., 194.

31 Ibid., 198-199.

32 Ibid., 199.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., 201.

36 Ibid., 193.

37 Habermas, 'Religion in the Public Sphere,' 121.

38 Ibid., 124-125.

39 Jens Köhrsen, 'How Religious is the Public Sphere? A Critical Stance on the Debate about Public Religion and Post-secularity,' *Acta Sociologica* 55, no. 3 (2012): 281, doi:10.1177/0001699312445809.

40 Archdiocese of Manila, 'Bishops' letter to President Aquino on Manila Bay Reclamation Project,' accessed September 16, 2014, <http://www.rcam.org/news/1188-bishops-letter-to-president-aquino-on-manila-bay-reclamation-project>.

41 Ibid.

42 Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Vatican website, sec. 54, accessed October 17, 2014, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

43 Ibid., sec. 55.

44 Fr. Eric O. Genilo, S.J., Fr. John J. Carroll, S.J., and Fr. Joaquin Bernas, S.J., 'Talking Points for Dialogue on RH Bill 96, filed 1 July 2010,' accessed January 16, 2015, http://www.jjcicsi.org.ph/?page_id=339.

45 Ibid.