

Centers for Catholic Studies and the Public Voice of Religion

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Abstract

This article explores debates about the public role of religion in a secular context. Drawing on the work of critical theorist, Jürgen Habermas, this article claims that the United States requires a viable public sphere in which religious and secular voices can learn from each other. Highlighting the work of the Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought at the University of San Francisco, this article argues that university centers and institutes for Catholic Studies potentially create such spaces to discover the public significance of religion.

The Joan and Ralph Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought celebrated its five-year anniversary in 2010. Marking this occasion, the Center published selected lectures that highlight its work at the University of San Francisco (USF). This publication, *For the City and the World: Conversations on Catholic Social Thought*,¹ was filled with diverse voices and topics. For example, Archbishop George Niederauer used the literary work of Flannery O'Connor as an entry point into the Catholic imagination; Kristin Heyer offered a feminist appraisal of Catholic Social Teaching, challenging Catholic institutions to manifest the justice that the Church proclaims; Bishop Robert McElroy examined the war in Iraq from the perspective of the just war tradition. These articles demonstrate the Center's ability to provide a bridge between the Church, the academy, and the world in the promotion of Catholic studies and Social Teaching. The book is an excellent example of how religion can enter and influence the public sphere.

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¹ Joan and Ralph Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought, "For the City and the World: Conversations on Catholic Social Thought" (San Francisco: University of San Francisco Press, 2010).

Why does this realization matter? More directly, why should we be concerned with the public voice of religion? Pope Benedict XVI speaks to this in his recent social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*. In this 2009 document on human development in the context of globalization, the Pope stresses the need for religion to have a public voice on social issues. He states:

The Christian religion and other religions can offer their contributions to development only if God has a place in the public realm, specifically in regard to its cultural, social, economic and particularly its political dimensions...The exclusion of religion from the public square—and, at the other extreme, religious fundamentalism—hinders an encounter between persons and their collaboration for the progress of humanity.²

Benedict XVI is not alone in his concern for the public role of religion. Prior to his encyclical, he discussed this issue with contemporary critical theorist and self-described agnostic Jürgen Habermas. The conversation, published as *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, revealed a great deal of common ground that transcends religious and secular boundaries. Both thinkers, among others, are interested in moving beyond extremes—fundamentalism on one hand and antireligious forms of secularism on the other. Although they maintain different presuppositions about religion, both Habermas and Benedict XVI recognize and defend the public value of religious voices. Furthermore, both thinkers highlight the Catholic tradition's insistence upon the complementary relationship between faith and reason as a resource for promoting the public voice of religion.³ Their conversation attests to the importance of addressing the public role of religion and highlights the potential of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition to contribute to this topic. These two figures make it clear that this debate goes beyond individuals trying to convert a pluralistic society toward a single religious worldview. In fact, religious and nonreligious individuals vary in their perspectives on the value of promoting religion in the public sphere, the possibility of making this a reality, and the process by which it can be achieved. This article will explore some of these debates on religion in the public sphere to articulate the role Catholic centers play in providing a location for such dialogue.

² Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (CV) #56, in "Origins," vol. 39 no. 9 (July 16, 2009), 129-159.

³ Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 37 and 69-70.

The United States' situation is unique when compared to other Western industrialized countries. It has a relatively high rate of religious belief and practice, and a long tradition of religious privatization^{3a} inspired by the political theory of John Rawls. To argue for the public value of religious discourse, addressing the meaning of secularism and the way that this shapes the relationship between church and state in the United States is necessary. By drawing upon the work of critical theorists, this article argues that the lack of a viable public sphere in this country makes it difficult to overcome the privatization of religion in a way that respects the legitimate secularity of the state.

Catholic higher education, in general, and university centers and thinktanks that promote Catholic studies and Catholic Social Teaching, in particular, create a necessary public space for the development of the public voice of the Church. With its longstanding emphasis on the complimentary relationship between faith and reason and increasingly widespread insistence upon the promotion of social justice and civic engagement, Catholic higher education provides an opportunity to realize the public significance of religion. Centers for Catholic studies, such as the Lane Center, can actualize this potential by promoting awareness and dialogue around the Catholic intellectual and social justice tradition across disciplines and beyond the college campus. By bridging the gaps between Church, academy, and world and by creating a space for critical discourse, places like the Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought become essential resources for responding to Benedict XVI's insistence upon the public role of religion.

Does Religion have a Public Voice in a Secular World?

The word "secularism" is not easily defined. Depending on context, it can mean the decline of religious practice or the privatization of religion. In a general sense, secularism refers to the way in which people relate to religion in the modern world. Scholars debate on two main points: how to define the effects of modernization on the way that we relate to religion, and how to articulate what that means for the role of religion in society. The "secularization thesis," which has been articulated in various ways by Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, among others, basically associates Western modernization with a decline in the

^{3a} Religious privatization, in the context of the liberal political tradition, refers to the disestablishment of religion from the state. This relies upon the association of the public sphere with the political sphere. See Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 55-58.

significance of religion. Weber argues that as modern societies rely on multiple fields of knowledge—modern sciences, humanities, and political theories—religion ceases to provide the only answer to how the universe functions and how we should make meaning of our lives.⁴ With the realization that religion provides but one worldview among others, religion becomes more rationalized and disenchanted. As a result of this process of disenchantment, or “demythologization” as Durkheim describes, the power of religion to maintain social cohesion decreases.⁵

While it is hard to deny that modern societies organize themselves with mechanisms, such as conceptions of citizenship and specialized fields of knowledge, that have replaced the premodern role of religion, the thesis that religion loses significance through modernization fails to capture the complexity of how people relate to religion today. Sociologists have revealed patterns of religiosity that contradict the assumption that religion is losing significance in the world. And, while one can observe a decline in religious belief and practice in Western Europe, the same trend is not observable in the United States.⁶ In addition to many non-Western countries, the United States has a relatively high rate of religious belief and practice, contradicting the theory that religion necessarily loses its significance in modern, industrialized countries.⁷

One does not have to study sociological data to encounter the power of religion in modern contexts. Just consider the many ways we can observe the public significance of religion in the news, in political debates, and in the symbolic life of a culture. In the United States, we encounter the significance of religion when politicians are asked to define or defend how their religious background influences their approach to policy issues. We encounter the significance of religion in debates on where it is appropriate to display the Ten Commandments and how we should observe religiously-inspired holidays. We encounter the significance of religion when individuals are inspired to acts of generosity and compassion

⁴ Max Weber, “Religious Rejections of the World and Their Direction,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

⁵ See especially chapter one in: Pippa Norris and Robert Inglehart, “Understanding Secularization” in *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3-33.

⁶ Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 25-30.

⁷ The Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life, “US Religious Landscape Survey” <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> see for data on religious belief and practice in the United States. For a global comparison, see the data provided by Norris and Inglehart in *Sacred and Secular*, 224.

in response to their faith. The U.S. context testifies to Jose Casanova's observation on the significance of religion in so-called secular societies: "Religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them."⁸

Charles Taylor has effectively thematized this observation of the contemporary role of religion in his work, *A Secular Age*.⁹ Taylor maps out conversations on the significance of religion throughout history to establish the uniqueness of our contemporary secular context. Ultimately, the secular age, according to Taylor, should be defined not by a decline in religious practice but by the multiple ways of relating to religion that coexist within the same society. Taylor enters into the conversation on secularity by examining the experiences of believers and nonbelievers. From this perspective, he is most interested in exploring the change "which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others."¹⁰ From this perspective, secularity is not characterized by a lack of faith but rather by the knowledge that religious belief and nonbelief are both acceptable options in a given society.

If these options coexisted peacefully in our world, the question of the public role of religion would not be as significant. When we consider the challenges posed by fundamentalism on one hand and aggressive atheism or antireligious secularism on the other hand, the need for a more intentional dialogue becomes apparent. This was a primary theme of the aforementioned conversation between Benedict XVI and Habermas, and both individuals have addressed it in their subsequent work. Benedict XVI frames the issue through the lens of the Catholic tradition, insisting upon the relationship between faith and reason. He states, "I would speak of a necessary relatedness between reason and faith and between reason and religion, which are called to purify and help one another. They need each other, and they must acknowledge this mutual need."¹¹

Habermas agrees with Benedict XVI on this basic point, commending the Catholic tradition's positive regard of reason in the pursuit of knowledge and truth. This commitment to reason is one possible way

⁸ Casanova, *Public Religions*, 211.

⁹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹ Habermas and Ratzinger, *Dialectics of Secularization*, 78.

that Catholicism can participate in the process of modernization, which is for Habermas, a necessary process that allows religious traditions to dialogue with the secular world. He suggests that religious traditions must become self-reflexive to survive in a postmetaphysical age and avoid the pitfalls of fundamentalism. The responsibility to promote dialogue is not left to the religious person alone. Habermas suggests that secular citizens must adopt an “ambivalent” or “agnostic” attitude toward religion “if they are to be prepared to learn something from the contributions of their religious counterparts to public debates which are potentially translatable into a generally accessible language.”¹² It is notable that Habermas recognizes that many religious traditions have gone through this process of becoming self-reflexive and have thus retained valuable contributions for society. In 2005 he suggested, “This arduous work of hermeneutic self-reflection must be undertaken from within the perspective of religious traditions. In our culture, it has been accomplished in essence by theology and, on the Catholic side, also by an apologetic philosophy of religion that seeks to explicate the reasonableness of faith.”¹³

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition, which insists upon the complementary relationship between faith and reason, is embodied, cultivated, and passed down, particularly in the context of Catholic higher education. In an essay on the uniqueness of Catholic higher education, Monika Hellwig identifies the “commitment to the continuity between faith and reason” as one of the characteristics of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, which has “direct implications for Catholic higher education and scholarship.”¹⁴ For Hellwig, this foundation not only opens up possibilities for engagement with the public sphere, but it also requires that we consider dialogue with the secular world as an aspect of our life as a Church. She states, “...the Catholic tradition has strongly emphasized the need to think through the coherence of the faith and to face challenges to it from secular events and knowledge. We see this as a practice of faith, not a rejection of it.”¹⁵

The Catholic tradition’s insistence upon the need to engage in rational reflection on faith as well as the need to allow our faith to inform how we approach reality should motivate anyone invested in Catholic

¹² Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, trans., Ciarin Cronin (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2008), 137.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁴ Monika Hellwig, “The Catholic Intellectual Tradition and the Catholic University” in *A Jesuit Education Reader*, ed. George Traub (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 248.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

higher education to take seriously the debates on the public role of religion. Hellwig notes that, while this approach to knowledge is particularly relevant in the areas of philosophy and theology, it should have implications across the curriculum of a Catholic university.¹⁶ Specifically, Catholic Social Teaching should have implications on the way that we teach business, politics, etc. This interdisciplinary engagement with the Catholic Intellectual Tradition allows a Catholic university to be a locus for the vocational formation of students, preparing them to engage in questions of value and meaning that will inform their careers and their participation in society.

Because the integration of the Catholic tradition into the life of the university is a shared task across disciplines, centers for Catholic studies can be particularly helpful for facilitating this effort. One way that the Lane Center has promoted the interdisciplinary exploration of Catholic studies is by hosting roundtable discussions for faculty involved in the Catholic Studies and Social Thought minor. These discussions feature the research of a faculty member and provide the opportunity for faculty from multiple disciplines to comment on each other's work. As more faculty continue to become involved in these discussions, the Center's efforts to enrich the university's approach to Catholic studies and to allow for a deeper engagement with the Catholic Intellectual Tradition are fulfilled.

In addition to facilitating discussions about the Catholic tradition within the university itself, the Lane Center provides a space to explore the intersections between faith and society. For example, in March of 2011 the Center sponsored a roundtable discussion on Catholic Social Teaching and immigration, bringing together scholars from the three Jesuit universities of California. During the conversation and the public panel that followed, the program examined how the religiously-based social ethics of the Catholic tradition could inform concrete policies. In addition, the question of how the social and political reality could be more adequately addressed by the social teaching and social engagement of the Catholic Church was thoroughly examined. The exchange between religious and secular knowledge that occurs at the Center is important if Catholic higher education is to promote the mutual learning process between religious and secular citizens that both Benedict XVI and Habermas identify as important. Drawing upon the language of critical theory, the Center provides a "public space" in which this dialogue can occur.

¹⁶ Ibid., 256.

The Challenges of the U.S. Context—Where is the Public Sphere?

In a context like the United States, the essential question is: “How can this dialogue be addressed in a way that respects the legitimate distinction between church and state?” Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff lead the debate on the implications of secularity with respect to the relationship between church and state in a modern democracy.¹⁷ Their exchange provides a foundation for understanding the issues behind the debate on religion in the public sphere in the modern political context of the United States. Audi follows John Rawls by asserting that the government should be neutral with regard to religion, and that religious citizens must translate their religious obligations into “public reasons” to participate fully in a democratic society.¹⁸ By limiting our political motivations to public reasons, Audi argues that we should only support a policy that we can defend with secular principles, ones that do not “depend upon the existence of God.”¹⁹ In other words, religious reasons do not count as publicly valid reasons to guide our participation as citizens. In his view, the ethics of citizenship demand that religious members of a democracy achieve their own “theo-ethical” equilibrium that will allow them to understand the ethical principles of their religious convictions in secular language. Audi suggests that “mature, rational, religious people” readily look for overlap between religious and secular convictions.²⁰

Wolterstorff disagrees with the liberal position proposed by Audi and Rawls. Instead of insisting that the state should be “neutral” toward religion, he argues that the state should remain “impartial.”²¹ Unlike the liberal position, his stance does not demand a strict separation between the church and state; however, it defends the individual and societal rights to religious freedom and expression within a liberal democracy by insisting that the government should not give official preference to one religion over another. In other words, individuals should be able to justify their political commitments using religious language although the state cannot adopt the language of a single religious tradition. Wolterstorff grounds his argument in the value of religious diversity, insisting that

¹⁷ Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 25.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

citizens need to learn to “honor each other’s particularity as well as their commonality,”²² stressing that religious differences are unavoidable in a pluralistic society. He argues that an individual’s approach to citizenship is shaped by multiple factors, including religious ones. Therefore, citizens should not be asked to exclude their religious motivations from their political participation.

Habermas positions himself in between the liberal position of Audi and Rawls and the alternative position of Wolterstorff. Habermas agrees with Wolterstorff’s insistence that religious citizens should not be forced to separate their religious and secular commitments to fully participate in democracy. He states, “The liberal state must not transform the necessary *institutional* separation between religion and politics into an unreasonable *mental and psychological* burden for its religious citizens.”²³ In other words, religious reasons should not be bracketed off as unacceptable reasons for supporting or opposing a political decision. However, he agrees with the liberal conviction that public policy needs to be framed in generally accessible language. Following Rawls, Habermas associates generally accessible language with secular language. Unlike Rawls and Audi, however, Habermas insists that the translation of religious language into secular language should not be left to the religious citizen alone. Religious and secular citizens should learn from each other, discovering a common language through dialogue. Habermas states, “... [the] translation must be conceived as a cooperative task in which the nonreligious citizens must likewise participate if their religious fellow-citizens, who are ready and willing to participate, are not burdened in an asymmetrical way.”²⁴

From Habermas’ perspective, the process of translation becomes a shared responsibility, which allows religious and secular citizens to learn from each other as they retrieve the valuable contributions from religious traditions and express them in a way that is meaningful within a secular framework. For example, if Christians opt for conscientious objection because of the nonviolent example of Jesus, they do not have to detach their Christian commitment from their political stance. However, policies that address conscientious objection should be expressed in nonreligious language so that everyone affected by those policies can understand and participate in them. The policies that emerge from this exchange, however, should reflect the truth-claims of both religious and

²² Ibid.

²³ Habermas, *Religion in the Public Sphere*, 130; emphasis in original.

²⁴ Ibid., 131-132.

secular individuals. Perhaps the Christian view offers a unique approach to pacifism that can benefit the society. Non-Christians can only receive the benefit of this tradition if both Christians and non-Christians are willing to enter into dialogue; only out of these conversations will a common language emerge.

Where Can Such Conversations Occur?

The mutual learning process that can occur between religious and nonreligious people necessitates a critical public sphere that mediates between the level of policy, which is biased toward secular language, and the level of one's immediate community, which may be unintelligible to a broader audience. What is the "public sphere?" Does it automatically exist in a given society? Specifically, where do we locate the public sphere in the United States? These questions can be addressed using the insights of contemporary critical theory on the nature and the role of the public sphere.

Although Habermas is not the only scholar that has made a significant contribution to the Western understanding of the "public sphere," his work has been particularly influential, making it a good starting place for the exploration of the topic. In 1989, his 1960 German text was translated into *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, sparking debate within the English speaking community about the nature of the public sphere and its value in modern democratic societies.²⁵ As the title suggests, Habermas sees the modern public sphere as a creation of bourgeois society, emerging in the eighteenth century with the rise of capitalism. The new economic system resulted in a distinction between the state and civil society, which marks the realm of private property and market activity. Within this context, the public sphere emerged as an intermediary space that allowed property owners to articulate the public significance of their private interests in such a way as to influence the state. Habermas stresses that the bourgeois public sphere had a critical function: it was a place for citizens to establish common interests through rational debate and, in doing so, shape public opinion.²⁶

According to Habermas, the bourgeois concept of "publicness" was unprecedented. Prior to this conception of the public sphere, people could go

²⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Berger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, chapter 2.

beyond the limitations of their private lives only through representation. Exemplified in the feudal system of the High Middle Ages, individuals could experience a level of visibility outside of their private lives through their representative authority, i.e., the nobility and the Church. Habermas stresses that this type of publicness “was not constituted as a social realm, that is, as a public sphere; rather, it was something like a status attribute.”²⁷ This type of pseudo-public sphere that existed in premodern conditions has notable similarities to our contemporary experience of publicness. Today, the nobility has been replaced with the celebrity who offers a projected visibility of the ordinary person. Habermas describes the “re-feudalization” of the public sphere as a process by which we assume a consumer orientation toward the media rather than a critical stance. With this posture, we search the media for a representative public opinion that appeals to us. In this context, Habermas claims, “Publicity loses its critical function in favor of a staged display; even arguments are transmuted into symbols to which again one can not respond by arguing but only by identifying with them.”²⁸ From this perspective, the loss of a critical public sphere has detrimental effects on a democracy because public opinion is no longer shaped through debate; rather, it is sold through mass appeal.

Not surprisingly, Habermas understands the bourgeois ideal of an inclusive and critical public sphere to be essential for democracy. He expresses concern over the loss of a critical public sphere in our media-driven culture.²⁹ At the same time, Habermas admits that this democratic ideal was never realized in history, noting that the bourgeois public sphere was limited to landowners, thus excluding women and lower classes. Despite this reality, Habermas insists that the ideal of the public sphere “had positive functions in the context of the political emancipation of civil society” because it allowed members of society to bracket their inequalities and see themselves as common citizens.³⁰ In other words, the functional success of the public sphere, for Habermas, counteracts its limitations.

Critical theorist Nancy Fraser challenges Habermas’ idealization of the bourgeois public sphere. She notes that the bourgeois public sphere was not *the* unprecedented public sphere that should serve *de facto* as the ideal for our understanding of publicness. In fact, she argues that multiple public spheres have emerged throughout history as

²⁷ Ibid., 7.

²⁸ Ibid., 206.

²⁹ Ibid., chapter 2.

³⁰ Ibid., 56.

subjugated populations have formed alternative spaces for the expression of their interests. Specifically, she points to the example of U.S. feminism as a “subaltern counterpublic” that has served to “formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs”³¹ against the dominant society. The reality of counterpublics challenges Habermas’ insistence upon the positive function of the ideal of inclusivity despite its utopian status. Fraser argues that instead of bracketing social inequalities so citizens can come together as a common people, “it would be more appropriate to unbracket inequalities in the sense of explicitly thematizing them.”³² Following this suggestion, Fraser argues against the ideal of a single public sphere as not only unrealistic, but also undesirable. Assuming homogeneity of common interests prior to inclusively participating in expressing those interests publicly actually counters the democratic aim for inclusivity.

When considering how to carve out a public sphere in the U.S. context, Fraser’s perspective is critical. Inviting us to consider the health of democracy by allowing multiple publics to interact with each other instead of trying to create a single homogenous public sphere, this model leaves more room for religious diversity. Moreover, Fraser’s perspective comes the closest to providing a way forward beyond the Audi-Wolterstorff debate toward realizing a public space that allows religious voices to participate.

What does this look like in practice? In other words, how do we realize or create public spaces for the exchange of religious and secular discourse? Concurring with Fraser’s insistence upon multiple public spheres, I suggest that Centers for Catholic studies create a public sphere, as has been already seen at certain institutions. In particular, my experience working at the Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought at the University of San Francisco has provided me an effective example of how university centers and thinktanks can create spaces for critical discourse that includes all voices—religious and secular.

Centers for Catholic Studies: Creating a Public Sphere for Religious Voices

The Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought at the University of San Francisco provides a concrete model of a contemporary

³¹ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 123.

³² *Ibid.*, 120.

thinktank that provides a public space for diverse voices in society. The Lane Center meets the demands of a modern, postsecular context, creating a public space for dialogue between religious and secular perspectives. This is achieved by fostering reflexivity with respect to one's own religious worldview, by creating interdisciplinary conversations around what it means to be Catholic, and by providing a forum for collaboration between religious and secular voices.

One of the ways that the Lane Center fosters reflexivity within the Catholic tradition is by facilitating occasions for historically conscious theological reflection. The archives of the Lane Center's biannual magazine, *Urbi et Orbi*, present five years of theological engagement on diverse topics ranging from matters of public policy to explorations of science, art, and the humanities. For example, Dr. Albert Jonsen's 2005 lecture published in *For the City and the World*, "From Mutilation to Donation: Revising Moral Doctrine, Catholic Theology, Organ Transplantation and Social Policy" traces the development of the Catholic theological response to medical advances in the area of organ transplantation. Observing how Catholic theologians and ethicists revised their language around this reality demonstrates the historical, contextual nature of theological reflection. The shift toward a more historically-conscious way of thinking promotes reflexivity and invites theologians to consider how one's context, culture, and language shape his or her categories of thought.

The Lane Center also promotes dialogue on what it means to be Catholic, drawing upon the interdisciplinary resources of the University as well as the richness of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. The Lane Center accomplishes this in part through co-ordinating the Catholic Studies and Social Thought Program, through which students can earn a minor in Catholic Studies and Social Thought, at the University of San Francisco. The Center describes the comprehensive scope of the program:

The undergraduate minor is conceived as an interdisciplinary engagement between and among forms of Catholic social thought as expressed in social theory, the Catholic social imagination, and the Roman Catholic magisterial discourse on society... The program presents the principles and vision of Catholic social teaching as a complement to any major field of study from business to education to the sciences to the arts and humanities.³³

³³ Joan and Ralph Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought at the University of San Francisco, Information on the Catholic Studies and Social Thought Minor, <http://www.usfca.edu/artsci/cath>.

By encouraging the exploration of Catholic studies beyond the theology and religious studies department, students develop a more comprehensive understanding of the Catholic tradition. The interdisciplinary nature of the minor brings together faculty from a variety of disciplines to collaborate on questions relating to Catholic identity and to the mission of USF. The Lane Center has assumed an important role in facilitating dialogue on the Jesuit Catholic mission and identity of the University not only in co-ordinating the minor but also through providing resources to faculty and staff such as immersions, retreats and missions, and identity conversations.

Finally, the Lane Center's mission to promote the principles of Catholic Social Teaching among the University and the world creates opportunities for dialogue between religious and secular communities on areas of public concern. These principles, which are intelligible in both communities, revolve around the dignity of the human person, the common good, and the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. The commitment to CST has been an integral part of the Center's mission since its establishment by USF sociologist Ralph Lane and his wife Joan. In founding the Center, Ralph and Joan Lane were interested in how the Catholic social tradition could be a resource for engaging in concrete social issues. The social tradition of the Church was recognized as integral to understanding the Catholic intellectual heritage and thus, was a key component of the Center's mission. USF president Stephen Privett stresses this connection, "Since Catholic social thought is an integral and essential component of the Catholic tradition, it must be a central consideration in any Catholic Studies program. The so-called 'option for the poor' is as old as the gospel and as current as Benedict XVI's encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*."³⁴

From this perspective, the Church's commitment to providing an intelligible and relevant social message to the world is inseparable from the Church's self-understanding. The Lane Center's mission reflects this:

The Center advances the scholarship and application of the Catholic intellectual tradition in the Church and society with an emphasis on social concerns. We sponsor academic programs, research and public praxis to promote and engage Catholic social thought especially in response to contemporary issues in order to fashion a more just and humane world.³⁵

³⁴ Stephen Privett, personal communication, December 8th, 2010.

³⁵ Joan and Ralph Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought at the University of San Francisco, Mission Statement, <http://www.usfca.edu/lanecenter/>.

By sponsoring research, events, and programs that necessitate an interaction between the Catholic Church and society, the Lane Center creates a public space. In the model of a thinktank, the Center does not directly inform public policy, but allows freedom to use religious language; thus the Center provides an opportunity for an encounter with religious and secular voices. The praxis-orientation of the Center also defines the purpose of the interaction and creates a sense of urgency behind the task of translation. It is not just an academic exercise but also a real commitment to creating a “more just and humane world” that compels the mutual learning process between religious and secular individuals.

The question of how religion enters into the public sphere is of the utmost importance when we consider how a considerable segment of society encounters the public representation of religion—either as extreme forms of fundamentalism or as antireligious secularism. If religious voices are going to exercise a positive role in the formation of public policy, there needs to be a real dialogue between religious and secular individuals. The Catholic tradition’s insistence upon the relationship between faith and reason offers an important resource for this task. Centers for Catholic studies, which draw upon this rich tradition and bring it into conversation with the university and the world, are in a unique position to create these public spaces that can harness the resources of a religious voice for society. Why should religious and secular people commit themselves to the arduous task of learning from each other? Nothing is more compelling an answer than the demand for justice in the world.