

Religion or Worldview:

Enhancing Dialogue in the Public Square

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Abstract:

Discussions involving religion's place today in politics, the academy, the media, even in shaping public policy, in essence the public square, is not without its controversy, misunderstandings and challenges. At what point, however, does use of the term religion become counter-productive or serve to impede that discussion. At what point does its use limit our understanding of the variety of other beliefs and values equally at play in the public square? Might a more inclusive term, implemented at certain times and in certain situations, be more helpful in understanding the variety of beliefs, values and principles operating in the public square? This paper suggests that use of the term *worldview*, rather than exclusively *religion*, might enhance dialogue, broaden the discussion and expand the parameters to create a more level playing field, and to examine other perspectives which contrast or compete with religion in the public square.

Introduction

A book on the late Pierre Trudeau, one of Canada's most well-known politicians, highlighted the "faith behind his politics" (English, Gwyn, & Lackenbauer, 2005). *Globe and Mail* political columnist John Ibbitson (2003) stated a few years ago that because "liberal democracy is the product of Christian civilization", we should "retain Christian holidays, begin daily sessions of federal and provincial parliaments with Christian prayer, and keep God in the national anthem." Allan Gregg (2005), one of Canada's prominent pollsters, stated that the Canadian public ought to be more cognizant of Christian involvement in politics. Tommy Douglas, chosen the "most famous Canadian" and founder of the Canadian Commonwealth Federation party, forerunner of the current New Democratic Party, was a Baptist Minister (McLeod & McLeod, 2004). On the international scene, it was known that former US president Ronald Reagan had strong religious beliefs, as has former British Prime Minister Tony Blair (Brinkley, 2007; Dale, 2000). French President Nicolas Sarkozy, in a country that is officially secular, has indicated that "religious faith is a defining element of identity" and has made repeated references to religion in public speeches (Sachs, 2008). As indicated by these few examples, religious faith is evident in the public square, if not actively so.

Sociologist Peter Berger went a step further and argued that faith is so intricately involved in the public square today that “those who neglect religion in their analysis of contemporary affairs do so at their great peril” (Berger, 1999, p. 18). Today few would deny the impact of religion on South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the abolitionist efforts of William Wilberforce, Poland’s overthrow of Communism, or the Dalai Lama’s bid for Tibet’s political autonomy (Tutu, 1999; Belmonte, 2002; Iyer, 2008). Lots of religion intertwined and intermingled with politics, and not surprisingly so. It was Gandhi who said that “those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know their religion” (Metha, 1976, p. 69).

Yet, there are concerns regarding religion and politics – they make strange bedfellows. Religion has been problematic for politics and politicians. In the United States, presidential candidates make public their religious affiliation, yet the strict separation of church and state ensures that politicians carefully avoid linking religious beliefs to public policies. John F. Kennedy, the first Catholic to be elected president, quelled fears by insisting that his beliefs would not influence his presidential decision-making. In Canada, on the other hand, politicians generally avoid publicly mentioning their religious affiliation or inclination, for fear of having their issues directly linked to particular faith groupings, especially the religious right. Public debates concerning abortion, euthanasia, stem cell research and same sex marriage outed and marginalized those whose positions were directly linked to religious beliefs (Somerville, 2003).

Yet, controversial or not, religious beliefs and values do influence public debates and decision-making, to greater or lesser degrees. But so do other beliefs and values, perhaps to even larger degrees. Which ones are these, and of what nature are they? How can we better identify and understand them, and then gain some sense of why and where they compete or align with religious beliefs and values?

Religious questions and issues have also been controversial in the media. Recognition of its persistence, in spite of secularization theories that predicted its demise, has focused attention anew on religion and much has been written on religion recently in the media. Today newspapers, newsletters, reviews and websites are devoted to enhancing public discussions of the place of religious faith in the public square. Yet, the media struggles in presenting religion in all of its breadth, depth and nuances, with much reporting all too often portraying religion in divisive right versus life and fundamentalist versus liberal camps (Sharlet, 2008; Lerner, 2006). The secular media especially is challenged in its tendency to narrow if not reduce religion in ways sometimes unrecognizable to its own adherents (Carter, 1993). This can be problematic in that it neglects to appreciate the full ramifications of religious beliefs and values in the lives of adherents. But it also neglects to address how these beliefs and values differ, compete or align with other beliefs and values operative in the public square.

Lastly, religion has been problematic for the secular academy. The large public universities of the Western world have been founded by Christian denominations to give greater understanding to religious beliefs (Newman, 1982). But there has been a significant change in the worldviews that have come to dominate the centre of the academy, so much so that it has been argued that it is “outrageous” in many quarters to link religious faith to scholarship (Marsden, 1994, 1997; Taylor, 2007). Others feel that the religious questions are all too rarely raised in political, economic, and educational debates (Reuban, 1996; Nord, 1995). Hart states that “religion does not do well in the hands of academics, whether they are sympathetic to it or not ... academic inquiry waters religion down to the point where faith makes no actual difference” (Hart, 1999, p. 12). Clark has long felt that such a sustained attitude had a negative impact on university educated people: “religion today is not popular among many educated persons; I have heard it denounced as the greatest plague of mankind” (Clark, 1989, p. 182). Neglecting to give religion its due at the academic table limits the discussion, but it also leads to the uncritical acceptance of other perspectives – other beliefs and values that hold great sway in the public academy if not the public square.

Nonetheless, religion continues to be debated and discussed at length in the academy, and there is even strong indication of increased interest in it among students, if less so among faculty (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2007; Chickering, Dalton & Stamm, 2006). Yet, where interest has been shown in matters religious the academy has tended to consign it to specific Centres or Religious Studies departments. But even here concerns arise. McIntire claims that mainstream Religious Studies itself has misunderstood religion. It has failed to take seriously that “by which people orient their lives to what they take to be basic and ultimate”, largely because it has adopted a “modernist scientific model” (McIntire, 2007, pp. 9, 10), corroborated ironically by Goldman’s (1992) difficulty in “finding God” in the very heart of Harvard Divinity School. Particular perspectives on reality appear to compete in the very domains formerly reserved exclusively for traditional religious beliefs and values. But what are these perspectives, and how can we identify and better understand them, particularly as they pertain to the public square?

What are we to make of all of this? The challenge here may be fourfold. One, religion continues to survive if not thrive in the 21st Century. In some religious sectors, such as American evangelicalism, a revival of significant proportions is clearly evident, defiantly resisting the aspersions heaped on it by a New Atheism. But in such divisive standoffs, pitting belief against unbelief, faith against non-faith, seems insufficient, if not confusing. Lacking is a deeper understanding of what constitutes the human; that all people believe or have faith in something, not just religious people. Needed is recognition of this universal human characteristic – common to both camps – and to address this when discerning beliefs and behaviours that mix, mingle or compete in the public square.

Two, religion is characterized all too often today by secularists who oppose it as something private and marginal, otherworldly and transcendent; as a kind of optional add-on to the secular life, best confined to sacred spaces and places. Such rendering of religion not only seems insufficient but also truncated. It fails to recognize that many who do embrace religious beliefs and values affirm that it does have great bearing on the secular life, on here and now. But while religion may be understood in a variety of ways, and defined as much by human behaviour as by beliefs and doctrines, what is lacking here by those inclined to reduce religion in such a manner is a deeper understanding that a wide variety of beliefs and values propel human thought and action. These may be religious or non-religious, this worldly and/or otherworldly. Needed therefore is not only a broader understanding of religion itself, but also an acknowledgement that beliefs and values in general are constitutive of the human, not just the religious person, and these play out in the public square.

Three, religion's continued persistence, even under great threat and persecution, speaks to its resilience and ability for renewal. In the darkest of times, its ability to bring hope and meaning, guidance and direction to countless groups and individuals testifies to its depth. Its ability to adapt to and speak to new scientific discoveries, altered economic circumstances, changed political contexts and challenging environmental realities, indicates its contribution to if not its relevance in the public square. But it is not just religious beliefs and behaviours that drive the human spirit in its multifarious ways. Human thoughts and actions in general, and those in the public square in particular, are shaped by beliefs and values derived from perspectives and orientations of a wide variety. These might be traditionally conceived, postmodernly revitalized, or be of a nature that is other than what is generally considered to be religious, but they too must be part of the conversation, and not least in the public square.

Four, the public square is not neutral, in spite of the greatest efforts on the part of some to define it as such. Countless efforts to sever or eradicate religion from the political realm, halls of learning, scientific endeavours, or business enterprises has not resulted in a religiously neutral or free playing field. The degree to which religion has been marginalized or removed has not, however, resulted in a "naked public square." Beliefs, values and principles still hold sway, even if they are not religious in the conventional sense (Hurd, 2008). People and entities continue to be shaped if not driven by views that may contrast or oppose religious ones. These too must be accounted for, if not identified and described, as having great import in the public square.

Some seek to identify, describe or define these other beliefs, values, and even behaviours as religious. But such endeavours are often awkward, frequently resisted and sometimes meaningless, in spite of some noticeable if not obvious similarities or parallels between religious and non-religious beliefs, values and behaviours. Categorizing all such beliefs, values and behaviours as religious becomes problematic, and perhaps even an impediment to a deeper understanding of those faiths that do impact the public square. Yet, the desire for a level rather than a neutral playing propels us to seek a more helpful approach and more inclusive terminology.

Equally problematic is any effort that seeks to replace religion as a relevant term and concept that distinctly describes or defines particular kinds of beliefs, values and behaviours. In spite of the fact that a common and precise definition and understanding of what constitutes the religious is a huge challenge, religion as a term and concept that points to particular kinds of beliefs and behaviours is familiar to all. This does require us, however, to think about those beliefs and behaviours that fall outside what is traditionally or conventionally described as religious; beliefs, nonetheless, that equally impact people's hearts and minds and lead to particular kinds of thoughts and actions. We are propelled, therefore, to broaden our understanding; to seek terms that are equally cognizant of these wide-ranging beliefs and behaviours impacting the public square..

Worldviews

One such term may be *worldview*. To enhance dialogue in the public square it may be more advantageous in certain contexts or situations to speak of "worldviews and politics", "worldviews and the media", or "worldviews and society" rather than merely or exclusively "religion and politics", "religion and the media", or "religion and society." While this approach will not be satisfying, suitable or adequate in all situations and contexts, it may serve us well at those times, places and junctures when the term religion is not sufficient or controversies, misconceptions, and polarizations tend to shut down rather than enhance discussion in the public square.

The term *worldview* is more inclusive of a multiplicity of beliefs and values that inform both private and public thoughts and actions. It recognizes competing perspectives that go beyond traditional religions, and resists restricting matters of faith exclusively to those traditional religions or to the private realm. It also repudiates the popular myth that those who admit to no religious affiliation thereby embrace no faith.

Use of the term *worldview* may also be more helpful in a post-Christian, post-modern era filled with religious and non-religious beliefs of various kinds. By implementing the term *worldview* we move beyond a sole focus on religion or traditional religion to include other perspectives, such as secularism, capitalism, exclusive humanism and atheism, to gain a greater understanding of ourselves and the world, and the fact that those thoughts and ideas hold great sway today in the public realm.

In some important ways this has already taken hold in the area of Religious Studies. But all too often non-religious perspectives, sometimes called "surrogate religions", ideologies, or philosophical systems, feel constrained, forced or contested as "religions" in the general sense of the term as well as in a domain that has focused largely if not exclusively on traditional religions. Further, these "other" perspectives do not come with readily acknowledged or identifiable sacred scriptures, belief systems, rituals and practices, yet there is recognition if not an intuitive sense that their influence and impact in the public square compares and competes with that of traditional religions.

Use of the term *worldview* also allows us to rethink how both religious and non-religious beliefs and values impact thoughts and actions. Worldviews are comprehensive and integrative frameworks by which we understand ourselves, others, and the world in which we live. They are the lenses, glasses or filters that *inform* our perceptions of reality, and in turn *form* our perceptions of reality. But as much as worldviews are *visions of life*, they are also *ways of life*. Though individual and personal in nature, worldviews become communal and public in scope and structure when common visions bind adherents together in communities of thought and action (Olthuis, 1985). Here we see clear parallels to religion, and certain visions and ways of life are clearly grounded in particular religious or spiritual traditions. Yet, they also include those perspectives that are not easily defined as religious. Worldviews, like traditional religions, come to historical, social, economic and cultural expression in a variety of different ways (Badley, 1996).

Both similarities and differences exist between all worldviews in general, as they do between all religious worldviews in particular. Traditional religions agree or disagree with each other on certain fundamental beliefs as much as they agree or disagree with non-religious or secular visions of life. Yet it has commonly been argued that all worldviews embrace basic principles of freedom and dignity, justice and equality, importance of community, concern for others and care for the environment. How these basic principles are expressed in particular ways of life which may become translated into specific actions in the public square or specific public policies depends largely on local, regional or national contexts where worldview differences play themselves out. These basic principles, which constitute the building blocks for moral visions and values, in turn allow for the possibility of social and communal cohesiveness within a plural society (Nord, 1995).

Worldview issues surface in all areas of life. What is important and why in the lives of individuals, groups of individuals, communities and nations impact their economic, communal, political, aesthetic, and educational outlook and decision-making. Worldviews guide, determine and shape public policy. They also guide, determine and shape what is considered meaningful, what is worth doing, and which causes may require sacrifice. One's worldview determines what one considers to be the great injustices of this world, and what one considers to be morally right and wrong. Worldviews can exercise conservative influence and progress. They also stimulate individuals and groups to become agents of social change, healing and redemption.

By examining worldviews, rather than only religions, we gain great insight into the moral, ethical, social and economic principles and visions of both famous and infamous world leaders, organizations, nations, state and non-state actors. We discover that many but not all are embedded in the beliefs and values of the great religious and spiritual traditions of the world. We learn of the principles that have motivated those to great acts of social and political justice that give freedom and dignity to others. On the other hand, we also come to see that some, equally motivated by powerful worldviews, unleash horrific acts of brutality, oppression, and destruction. Worldviews have consequences and, according to Weigel, “oceans of blood but also magnificent human achievements” have resulted from the unfolding of individual and collective worldviews (Berger, 1999, p. 22).

There are a number of frameworks or models that assist in enhancing our understanding of the worldviews we embrace. Tillich (1957) and others focused on worldviews as responses to life’s larger concerns or questions – what is the meaning and purpose of life, how to determine right from wrong, what are one’s responsibilities and obligations, and what is important and why – which in turn become the foundation of beliefs and actions (Olthuis, 1985; Sire, 2004). McKenzie develops a model that incorporates questions of ultimate meaning but to these he adds penultimate concerns that “shape the currents of ordinary life” and immediate personal concerns which arise from “the context of life goals, life activities, and interpersonal relationships” (McKenzie, 1991, p. 13). Smart (1983) articulates a six dimension model – experiential, mythic, doctrinal, ethical, ritual and social – that is helpful in identifying and describing aspects common to both religious and non-religious worldviews. Wright (1992) and others focus on stories or narratives that define human reality, are often expressed in powerful symbols – smokestacks (industrialism), dollar bills (capitalism), “golden arches” (consumerism), hammer and sickle (communism), cross (Christianity) – and come to include a praxis or way of being in the world.

These and other models, each helpful in their own way, lead to an understanding of worldviews as more than theories “in the mind.” Worldviews also lead to action. Worldviews “lived out” have, like traditional religions, dramatic consequences: liberation and freedom; oppression and destruction. These models also indicate that worldviews vary dramatically. Cox (1999), Nelson (2001) and Sinclair-Faulkner (1997) all give vivid examples and insight into the impact worldviews, religious or otherwise, have in shaping individual thoughts and actions, and how these in turn shape the society and culture of which we are part.

Worldviews in the Public Square

What will be gained then by expanding our parameters or horizons and using the term *worldview* to incorporate other beliefs and values in addition to those of traditional religion as we seek to enhance discussions in the public square? I suggest that we may gain in five ways. One, we will have opportunity to break through some simplistic understandings, unhelpful reductions, and narrow caricatures or stereotypes. Not surprisingly, the media continues to be enamored by popes and other religious leaders, especially when they travel to North America. But a way to get beyond a simplistic or tantalizing “spirituality lite”, an otherworldly reductionism, or a repudiating sound bite on celibacy, clergy abuse, or sexual immorality, may be to embed the intricacies of their thinking in their larger worldview perspective and from which emanate in depth analyses on the secular life and public policy issues. John Paul II’s perspective and thinking, for example, on important and complex issues such as human work and human rights, as spelled out in his various encyclicals, becomes more understandable when placed in the larger context of a variety of contrasting worldviews.

Today great accord is given to spiritual leaders such as the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Their particular visions and ways of life owe a great debt to larger religious perspectives in which they are grounded, with which they have intimate connections and from out of which they gain their spiritual creativity and their passion for social justice. Awareness of those particular religious perspectives, and other non-religious worldviews with which they clash, encourages discernment. At the 1993 Parliament of World Religions held in Chicago, a group of international scientists spoke of the “dawning of a new dark age.” They concluded that the “fundamental crisis in our world is not environmental, or economic, or political. The fundamental crisis is spiritual. It has to do with attitudes, beliefs, and practices. ... The solution lies in the rediscovery of spiritual values that empower people to change and lead new lives” (Ingham, 1997, p. 25). There is much merit to this analysis. Although one has a strong hunch, it is, nonetheless, not made specifically clear to which spiritual values they refer and in which particular worldview, religious or otherwise, they are embedded. As such, our analysis begs for greater worldview clarification.

The spirit of capitalism, consumerism, and individualism, all very powerful worldviews with equally powerful beliefs, values and behaviours, has also “empowered people to change and lead new lives” (Ingham, 1997, p. 25). But these “new lives”, embarked upon with great abandon in the last century, appear to have led to what these scientists now conclude is the “dawning of a new dark age”, one John Paul II called the “culture of death.” Dag Hammarskjöld, former UN Secretary-General and also an economist, may be quite correct when he states that “unless the world has a spiritual rebirth, civilization is doomed.” But again such a rebirth must be of a particular spiritual kind, not just *any* kind. That scientists are calling on certain religious leaders to assist in giving direction to “a new world order” may be a hopeful sign. Yet it is clear that certain political leaders have implemented “a new world order” that some feel has led to many of our current difficulties – again, the worldviews of capitalism, consumerism, and individualism readily come to mind.

Two, focusing on worldviews requires a closer examination of particular religions as distinct worldviews. Minimizing differences among the major religions of the world to promote greater dialogue, peace and harmony has its merits, but is not warranted when major worldview differences are ignored. The major religious traditions each have radically different beliefs and views on and about the meaning and purpose of life, how we should live, and the nature and existence of God. These cannot be minimized. Nor can the fact that history records all too well the bloodshed carried on in the name of religion. While the words of the Dalai Lama calling for “religious harmony and the setting aside of differences to make the world a better place” resonates well with the public, is laudable and to be encouraged, it would be a huge error to assume that since all traditional religions promote similar universal principles that they are therefore simply “different paths to the mountain top” (Mickleburgh, 2004).

Such a secular reduction is unhelpful and glosses over traditional religions as unique and distinct. Each religious tradition has particular understandings of reality, which at certain points may find congruence with other worldviews in certain shared principles. But ultimately each has different perceptions of “heaven and earth” – of the meaning, purpose of life, of death, of the nature of God. These different perspectives have influenced civilizations in radically different ways (Ratzinger & Pera, 2006; Stark, 2005). How particular religious traditions come to historical and cultural expression becomes apparent only when understood in their totality. Ibbitson (2003) argues that “Canada is blessed to be a liberal democracy, and that liberal democracy is the product of Christian civilization, and specifically Protestantism, not Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or Confusion cultures.” Current tensions in the Middle East and the Far East reflect the fact that liberal democracy neither flows readily from civilizations shaped by radically different religious traditions nor can be easily imposed upon them. But these religious traditions compete or align also with other worldview perspectives, for example, humanism, consumerism or capitalism, which have powerful and increasing formative influence on these emerging societies and cultures.

Three, the term *worldview* has steadily gained greater recognition and acceptance in the public in general and the public academy in particular perhaps because it is more inclusive of those who do not readily identify with traditional religions. There is also larger recognition of the fact that all humans have a worldview – “everyone has a mental map through which we perceive our world” – even if many do not embrace a particular religion (Lappé, 2003, p. 230).

Language earlier applied exclusively to religion is now applied readily to worldviews. Historian of religion Ninian Smart recognizes that the English language “does not have a term to refer to both traditional religions and ideologies” and as such has opted for a “worldview analysis” which studies both religions and secular ideologies” (Smart, 1983, pp. 1-2). Such analysis has become increasingly part of mainstream academia and is applied with greater frequency and clarity in the scholarly world. Wright (1992) speaks of the *Enlightenment worldview* with its emphasis on reason and the sharp distinction it makes between the natural and the supernatural. Berger and Luckmann (1997) spoke of *plausibility structures* (worldviews) as socially accepted patterns of beliefs by which all other beliefs are judged. Cox (1999) speaks of the *capitalistic worldview* which measures all that is esteemed and valued by the “Market God.” Schlosser speaks of “ideologies”, “worldviews” and “great unifying systems”, and their impact on the food industry, highlighting industrialism, fascism, communism and consumerism. He also sharply contrasts a North American “worship of the market” with the Soviet “worship of science” (Schlosser, 2002, pp. 225, 261), recognizing that religious terms such as “worship” are applicable to non-religious behaviour. Prominent Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki states that the *modern scientific worldview* gives “pre-eminent value to scientific knowing and technological power and control” (Suzuki, 1997, p. 190). Frances and Anne Lappé speak of the “new ideological battle” which is “defining who we are as humans”, and refer to “frameworks of larger meaning” which have become our “failing frameworks”, such as the *mechanical worldview* which sees the “world as machine” that “we can take apart, fix and reassemble” (Lappé, 2003, pp. 8, 9, 28). Those larger frameworks are not traditional religions but serve many of the same functions and purposes.

Four, use of the term worldview forces us to confront our own beliefs and the assumptions we critically or uncritically assume in light of them. The modernist mind set, firmly embedded in a rational worldview, asserted that truth or the wisdom of any course of action could be objectively ascertained by use of reason and the empirical method. It deemed all religions to be irrational and subjected them to philosophical, psychological, sociological and political critique. The Jewish philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel argued that these critiques “must also be subjected to a *religious* critique” (Marmur, 1997, p. 6). In the current postmodern climate it is now recognized that scholarship unavoidably “situates” itself in racial, gender, class, religious and sexual orientations. Equally important, if not more so, is the recognition that *every* scholar embraces certain unprovable beliefs which ground their worldview, and, as Polanyi argues, “the personal participation of the knower [is involved] in all acts of understanding” (Polanyi, 1958, p. vi). In other words, there is neither neutrality nor objectivity. The Lappés point out that the “unbiased expert is a fiction. Many so-called experts have more than a particular worldview influencing them – they have a financial stake in policy outcomes” (Lappé, 2003, p. 230). Not only is it important to recognize that worldviews are at play, but that these worldviews, religious or non-religious, compete in the public square.

Newbiggin states that “worldviews have as part of their power some promise of satisfying the longing for ultimate happiness” (Newbiggin, 1989, p. 179). Discernment of powerful worldviews, such as consumerism, and their promises of happiness become important for they easily make us, according to the Lappés, “believe our only path is the one we’re on, blinding us to solutions already in bud and within the reach of each of us.” Worldviews such as industrialism and global capitalism become *thought traps* which “limit our imagination, helping to create the hunger, poverty and environmental devastation all around us” (Lappé, 2003, pp. 9, 23). The Lappés encourage us to examine these worldviews if we are to change our current global courses of action. Use here of the term “worldview” permits a thorough investigation of the beliefs and values, religious or otherwise, that propel thoughts and actions.

Five, questions regarding which worldview or worldviews enhance the human condition seem more pressing today. The Lappés assert that it is not a question “whether we have a map – a worldview – but whether it is life serving” (Lappé, 2003, p 305). More inclusive discussions evaluating the worldviews we embrace – which ones liberate, which oppress, which are illusions, wreck havoc, create hardships, produce bloodshed, or which ones promote justice and equality for all, dignify the human, and preserve the environment for future generations – push us today to consider the implications of the beliefs and values we hold, encouraging us to discern which are more life-affirming. These may be the burning concerns of the day as we face huge global challenges not encountered in previous generations.

To frame these larger questions either only within or entirely outside the parameters of religion seriously limits the debate. Our discussions would be greatly advanced if they were expanded to examine a variety of worldviews, religious or otherwise, inquiring no less whether their narratives, symbols, doctrines and praxis are life-affirming and ought to be considered among others in the public square. This is a huge but perhaps necessary challenge today. A close examination, for example, of Bhutanese government policies, framed within a Buddhist worldview and which measure national progress by means of a *Gross National Happiness* index, contrasts sharply with Western government policies which embrace a capitalist, consumerist worldview and measure progress in terms of the *Gross National Product* index. According to Hunter (2000), the dominant or reigning plausibility structure exerts formative influence on all citizens, and rare is the worldview that does not consider others as threatening competitors. Raising questions about threatening or friendly competitors will allow us opportunity to examine those worldviews which come to define our thoughts and actions.

Conclusions

Discussions concerning the involvement of religion in matters pertaining to the public square will continue to remain, as they should. They will contribute enlightened and informative insights. One can also image that they will continue to be controversial and divisive for some time to come.

In light of the challenges that face us, however, we are not assisted if discussions pertaining to the public square narrow and restrict a critical evaluation of the wide variety of beliefs and values, religious or otherwise, that determine thoughts and actions. One way to get beyond the challenge and further enhance discussions in the public square is to broaden our scope.

Use of the term worldview, which incorporates a variety of perspectives, both religious and non-religious, is helpful in moving us in that direction. It permits more inclusive parameters, encourages examination of a variety of beliefs and values, religious or otherwise, and confronts us with assumptions we often commonly but uncritically embrace. It assists in a discernment of a variety of beliefs, values and principles operative in the public square and encourages us to look more broadly as we wrestle with challenges of the day. Most importantly, it serves to level the playing field and thereby enriches the public discussion.

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