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**SHOULD RELIGION HAVE A VOICE  
IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE?**

**Looking IN and Shouting OUT**

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**It has become increasingly apparent** over the last quarter century that some voices and views being dismissed from the public square, simply because they are religious. It seems this has resulted from more and more people believing that religion has no valid role to play in the public square. Indeed, many of them are, not only, openly hostile to any such participation, but also, are openly hostile to religion, itself.

I was recently asked to write an op ed article responding to the question “What do I believe is currently the world’s most dangerous idea?” I was curious to know what my colleagues and friends would say. All of those I asked said “religion”. I don’t agree, but that is a discussion for another occasion – or, perhaps, question time.

But observing this hostility led me to ask the question, “**Should religion be given a “pink slip” in the public square?**” That is, are these people correct, should religious voices be dismissed? My response is an absolute “No”, and, today, I hope to convince you, if that is not already your stance, that it should be.

Indeed, it occurred to me that the title of your conference, “Look IN Shout OUT”, states in a nutshell what I believe is the proper role of religion in the public square: Religion requires us both to “look in” and to “shout out”. Either without the other is, at the least, inadequate or even dangerous.

So, I want to look at both the arguments *against* religious voices having a valid claim to be heard in the public square - What are these arguments? Where do they originate? Why are they being presented? - and the arguments *for*

religious voices having a valid claim, or even a right, to be heard in the public square.

## **1. WHAT ISSUES ARE BEING DEBATED IN THE CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC SQUARE?**

In ethics it's a truism, but no less important for being so, that "good facts are essential to good ethics".

So, let's start with some facts. What are some of the issues currently being debated in the public square?

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If you read the newspapers, listen to documentaries on radio or watch the news on TV you'll see numerous reports on topics such as:

euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide;  
withdrawal of life-support treatment;  
treatment of seriously disabled new-born babies;  
access to health care, especially expensive new treatments;

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abortion;  
prenatal genetic screening;  
new reproductive technologies;  
"designer babies";  
cloning;  
human embryo stem cell research;

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artificial sperm and ova - making embryos from two same-sex adults;  
same-sex marriage;  
polygamy;  
sex education of children;

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the use of animals in research;  
“manimals” – embryos with both human and animal genes;  
synthetic biology;  
xenotransplantation – the use of animal organs in humans;  
transplant tourism;

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being soft/hard on crime and drugs;  
needle exchange clinics;  
safe injecting sites;  
capital punishment;

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law and ethics governing armed conflict;  
the ethics of robotic warfare;  
business ethics;  
corruption;  
environmental ethics;  
aid to developing countries;  
and so on.

These issues involve some of our most important individual and collective **social-ethical-legal values.**

That is true, in part, because many of these issues are connected with respect for **life, and with birth or death**, the two events around which we have always formed our most important individual and collective values.

These values, together with our principles, attitudes, beliefs, myths and so on, make up the **societal-cultural paradigm** on which our society is based – that is, the “**shared story**” that we tell each other and buy into in order to form the glue that binds us as a society.

**So, the question is: In a “secular society” such as Canada, does religion have any valid role to play in determining what these values should be?**

**Let’s look, first, at the nature of the conflicts we are experiencing with respect to the values that we should adopt.**

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### **2. VALUES CONFLICT**

What our collective values should be is currently a source of **conflict** – some call it “**culture wars**”.

These wars are often described as having two sides doing battle:

a **traditional**, conservative, often religious side

versus

a **post-modern**, liberal, moral relativist, often secularist side.

This division into two well-defined camps can be useful as a shorthand way to discuss these values issues, but it is an over-simplification, especially in relation to many of our current values issues, such as those I listed at the beginning of this address, viewed as **packages**.

Many **variations** in what constitutes one person's "**values package**" as compared with another person's package are possible. And it merits noting, here, that there is no one monolithic religious voice or, indeed, secular voice, these two broad groupings are also collections of many different voices.

In other words, the reality is far more mixed and complex than two "camps", and it's important to recognize that, as it tells us that although **we might disagree with "the other side" on some issues, we can agree with them on others**.

That recognition is also important because, as I will propose, I believe **searching for those agreements** – what I call **searching for a "shared ethics"** – is crucial in pluralistic, multicultural, multi-religious, secular, post-modern, democratic societies like Canada, to finding a values structure that will allow each of us as individuals and all of us as a society to flourish in the sense of realizing the fullness of what I call our **human spirit**.

The idea is to **find** what we have **in common ethically** so that we can **experience** ourselves as belonging to the **same moral community**.

As those **experiences accumulate** we will be more **able to find common ground than we can in any other way**.

But to do that will require the **presence of goodwill and the absence of hostility towards religion in the public square.**

Some people question whether there is such hostility. But, as George Weigel explains, “an **aggressive secularism ... tries to keep religiously informed moral argument out of the European public square [in debates]** about the nature of marriage, the challenge of biotechnology, the life issues, [and] Islam. ... [We need] to help shape a lay leadership in these new democracies that can develop **the voice of religiously informed public moral argument.** The task is a huge one.” (*Freedom, Sanctity, and the Future*, EPPC Online, Posted: Monday, August 10, 2009.)

Note that the hostility that Weigel describes arises precisely because many of the issues that must now be dealt with are the same ones I listed at the beginning of this address.

To understand and deal with this hostility, we have to understand how those opposed to religious values in the public square view religion. Speaking in Malta, Professor Roger Trigg, Academic Director of the Centre for the Study of Religion in Public Life at Kellogg College, Oxford, addressed the theme “Free to Believe? A Religious Conscience in a Secular Society.” He noted that religious viewpoints are frequently not respected or even accommodated. He said that **European authorities are inclined to see religion as a threat that must be controlled.** “What is developing is not neutrality but often hostility to religion, with an ideology of human rights taking its place,” he said. Similarly, Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, former Anglican Bishop of Rochester, England, has warned that aggressive secularism is leading to an “encroaching totalitarianism”

that has become a threat to freedom of conscience.

<http://www.consciencelaws.org/updates/2011-05-01.html#01>

We would do well to ask to what extent these warnings are also relevant to Canada.

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### **3. THE NEED TO CROSS DIVIDES: ABANDONNING EITHER/OR**

We need to be able to **cross our traditional divides** if we are to find some **shared ethics** in relation to such issues.

And when those divides are places of serious **conflict**, we must try even harder to find what we share and where we can agree.

**That is, not only can we, but we must, cross the secular/religious divide, science/religion divide and the divide between religions, if we are to find a “shared ethics” in our world.**

The starkest examples of refusals to cross these divides are

**the fundamentalist religious people  
and the fundamentalist neo-atheists  
such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett,  
Michel Onfray, Sam Harris and so on.**

We need to look at their modus operandi to understand why I label them fundamentalist.

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Like all fundamentalists the neo-atheists, first, want to **impose their views** on everyone else.

One of the most egregious current examples, which is an extension and putting into practice of their “religion has no place in the public square” approach, is that physicians have **no right to respect for their freedom of conscience and for their ethical and moral values.**

In stark contrast to fostering such respect, here’s the **Ontario Human Rights Commission’s** startling view of a physician’s obligation in the physician-patient encounter: “It is the Commission’s position that doctors, as providers of services that are not religious in nature [such as abortion], must essentially **‘check their personal views at the door’ in providing medical care.**” The commission makes clear that physicians’ “personal views” include their deepest and most important ethical and moral beliefs and values. In other words, this is a directive to physicians to **“park your ethics and values with your car outside the surgery”**. And the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario warned that failure to do so could result in legal liability for discrimination or loss of a licence to practice medicine.

Second, like all fundamentalists, the neo-atheists take an **either/or approach** – either my beliefs or yours; either science or religion, either reason or Faith - when we need to accommodate both sides of each of these divides.

**Fundamentalists**, whether secular or religious, then **seek to reconcile** what they see as the **conflicts** between the two elements that make up each of these pairings, by **dropping one** or the other of them.

**The secularists drop religion; the religious people drop science.**

Richard Dawkins' call for the **elimination of religion** demonstrates such a choice on his part.

And, third, they engage in **proselytizing** in an effort to impose their views

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The advertising slogan, "There's probably is no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life," on buses in Britain and Canada, is an example that attracted a great deal of media and public attention.

One problem with this approach is that proposing that science and religion or reason and faith are in conflict is *not neutral* in terms of its impact on **finding a "shared ethics"**; it's **very harmful** to attaining that goal.

The neo-atheists would like to reduce **religion**  
to nothing more than a **personal fantasy or superstition**.

But that's **not realistic**. It's an impossible dream on their part.

At best it will fail, at worst it will do serious harm  
– it will **exacerbate the acrimony** of the values conflicts  
and make it more likely, not less likely,  
that **religion will become a focus of serious conflict**.

Also, because **culture and religion are linked**,  
even within democratic multicultural pluralistic Western societies  
it will increase the number and intensity of the current values clashes  
and may **contribute to culture wars**.

And it merits noting that, like the fundamentalist neo-atheists, fundamentalist religious people also make finding a shared ethics, at best, difficult.

One way of trying to cross some of our current divides would be to see whether might we be able to find **some ethical universals** that are **common to all people** whether or not they are religious and, if so, no matter which religion they espouse.

Might we able to say that these ethical universals are so **widely shared over such a long period of time across so many different cultures that they can be taken as characteristics of being human** — that is, they are innate to being human?

And might the **various religions** be one source  
of the **shared ethics wisdom** that we seek?

For instance, some version of the **Golden Rule**  
is to be found in all **major world religions**.

Some scholars – **theologians, philosophers and religious studies academics** - are looking at a range of **world religions** and analyzing their relation to **human rights declarations**.

And some **secular philosophers**, for instance, German philosopher Jurgen **Habermas**, are suggesting, as a possibility for finding some common ethics ground, a concept of an “**ethics of the [human] species**”, which might have a genetic base.

I’d call this concept “**human ethics**”.

Now, let's look at what we mean by a secular society

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### 4. SECULAR SOCIETY...

By a secular society **I specifically do not mean** a society in which religious and spiritual voices are excluded from the public sphere.

As I've said already, I do **not agree** with the **secularist argument** that religion has no valid role in our shared values formation and has no place in the public square, or at least nothing valuable to contribute, or certainly nothing valuable beyond the purely private sphere.

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But, at the same time, I recognize that **religion cannot function in the public square in the same way as it did in the past.**

We form society through a journey of the **collective human imagination.**

In the past, a given group or society found their collective human imagination and **undertook the journey of the collective human imagination through religion.** In other words, among other functions, a shared religion was used to create and carry the community's collective imagination.

To state the obvious, this situation has **changed in two ways:**

First, in our post-modern interconnected world, the **collectivity involved in searching for a shared ethics is everyone,** not just one, more or less, homogenous, isolated community.

Now the **entire world** — literally — is, in some senses, although certainly not all, our **local community.**

And, of course, we do **not have a universally shared religion** in either our national or global communities.

Moreover, **in addition to our myriad of religious traditions, some of us are not religious** and some of the latter are **militantly anti-religious**, just as some religious people are, sadly, **militantly religious**.

**So, if we cannot use religion to find our collective imagination and bind ourselves together, how then do we do that?**

Can, as fundamentalist neo-atheists propose, a **purely secular approach** replace religion in this matter? Can an approach that expressly excludes religious voices do so?

I have long pondered why **fundamentalist neo-atheists** are so passionate about their disbelief.

Why aren't they just **indifferent** to religion and people who are religious? Hate is not the opposite of love – both are similar passions, but of opposite content - indifference is the opposite of both.

I've proposed elsewhere that humans' search for spirituality might have a genetic base and be an epigenetic phenomenon – that is, the genetic base must be imprinted (activated) by an environmental trigger. If so, it would not be surprising that humans experience an **inner space** that needs to be filled and if not filled by religion in its traditional mode then it will need to be filled by something else that can function in a similar manner.

I suggest that atheism is one example of what can be called “**secular religions**”, and atheists’ passion about it could show that we have a need for some form of powerful belief (or disbelief) in order to find meaning in life.

The word religion comes from **re...ligare** – to bind together.

We might need to bind together to **experience transcendence** – the feeling of belonging to something larger than ourselves – which we might need to experience to find meaning in life.

Values surveys have found that a **longing for transcendence** is a rapidly escalating phenomenon in our **intensely individualistic Western societies**.

But today, much more than in the past, we humans need to **bind together across our differences** to form a **society**.

Doing that is a **major challenge** even just within our local or national societies in the West, as they become more and more **internally diverse**. One response could be the emergence of secular religions.

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### ***Secular religions...***

It’s indisputably true that **humanism and atheism** function as secular religions binding their adherents through common belief and ideology. They are expressed as secularism, which, more and more, has become “**aggressive secularism**”.

**Science** can also function as a secular religion and does so when it becomes **scientism**.

The same is true of **ethics** when it becomes **moralism**.

It's also true, I believe, of **sport**, when it becomes *sportism*, especially when that is combined with another powerful “ism”, *nationalism*.

And **environmentalism** is at least a secondary religion for more and more people – but even that has its disbelievers and critics! And, most recently, we can also include **transhumanism** as a secular religion.

In short, we are witnessing the **emergence of a very large number and range of secular religions**.

None of these “isms” is harmful in itself, but they are harmful to finding a **shared ethics** when they are promoted – as, for instance, Dawkins does with **scientism** - to deny any space for spirituality and traditional religion in the public square and replace those with *secularism*, the most encompassing secular religion that functions as a basket holding all the others.

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In other words, I am arguing that it's a **mistake to accept that secularism is neutral**, as its advocates claim – it's not. It too is a belief system used to bind people together. And if, despite being a belief system, secularism is not excluded from the public square, then religious voices should not be excluded on that basis.

**The mistake is in taking a disjunctive (either secularism or religion) approach to a situation that requires a conjunctive (both this and that, secularism and religion) approach.**

**We need all voices to be heard in the democratic public square.**

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*Secular democratic society...*

The basic **principles** on which **democracy** is founded  
are **liberty and equality**.

At its best, the **genius of democracy** is that it functions by allowing us to live peacefully together despite our differences by enabling us

- **to find where we can agree** and
- **to hold in creative tension**, rather than destructive tension, the issues we disagree about.

To **privilege secularism**, as its advocates argue should be done,  
is to **contravene the liberty and equality principles of democracy**  
and to prevent democracy functioning as it should  
- in short it's profoundly anti-democratic.

We are **secular, democratic societies** and there is rightly a **separation of Church and State**.

The question is: **What does respecting that separation require?**

**Separation of Church and State** means the **state, and its laws and public and social policy, are not based directly on religious beliefs and laws** as, e.g., in Islamic societies such as Iran.

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The doctrine is meant to protect the state from being controlled or wrongfully interfered with by a religion or religions, and to protect religions, within their valid sphere of operation, from state interference or control. For instance, the Chinese government's interference in the appointment of Roman Catholic bishops in the country contravenes the doctrine of separation of church and state. The doctrine of separation of church and state can be viewed as having division of powers or demarcation of jurisdictions functions.

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Those wanting to exclude religion from the public square have created confusion among:

Freedom *of* religion;

Freedom *for* religion; and

Freedom *from* religion

**Freedom of religion** – the state does not impose a religion on its citizens - there is no state religion.

**Freedom for religion** – the state does not restrict the free practice of religion by its citizens.

**Freedom from religion** – the state excludes religion and religious voices from the public square, in particular, in relation to law and public policy making.

The first two freedoms are valid expressions of the doctrine of the separation of church and state. The third is not.

This mistaken interpretation of the doctrine of “separation of church and state” has been promoted by secularists in order to win a victory for their values in the

culture wars by eliminating consideration of the values of their opponents by excluding those opponents on the basis that their views are religiously based.

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*So, should moral values based on religious beliefs - as compared with religious voices or religious beliefs - be excluded from the public square, as some secularists argue?*

For many people, their moral reasoning is connected with their religious beliefs. To exclude them and their moral views from the public square, because of the source of their beliefs, would be to disenfranchise them.

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In *Chamberlain v. Surrey School District*, Mr. Justice Mackenzie, writing for a unanimous Court of Appeal for British Columbia, interpreted what subsections 76(1) and (2) of the *School Act*, [R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 412](#), that read as follows, required:

**ss.76** (1) All schools must be conducted on strictly secular and non-sectarian principles.

(2) The highest morality must be inculcated, but no religious dogma or creed is to be taught in a school or Provincial school.

A school board decision not to include books on same-sex families as learning resources for kindergarten students was challenged on the basis that the decision of the board's members was based on religious beliefs.

The court **first made a “distinction between religion and morality.**

[R]eligion and morality are not synonymous terms. ... [M]oral positions [whether secularly or religiously based] taken as **positions of conscience are entitled to full participation in the dialogue in the public square where moral questions are answered as a matter of law and social policy. ... There is no bright line between a religious and a non-religious conscience.**

...

Moral positions must be accorded equal access to the public square without regard to religious influence. **A religiously informed conscience should not be accorded any privilege, but neither should it be placed under a disability.**

...

Today, adherents of non-Christian religions and persons of no religious conviction are much more visible in the public square than a century ago and any truly free society must recognize and respect this diversity in its public schools. “Strictly secular and non-sectarian” must be interpreted in a manner that respects this reality. **That respect precludes any religious establishment or indoctrination associated with any particular religion in the public schools, but it cannot make religious unbelief a condition of participation in the setting of the moral agenda. ...** “[S]trictly secular” in the *School Act* can only mean pluralist in the sense that moral positions are to be accorded standing in the public square irrespective of whether the position flows out of a conscience that is religiously informed or not. The meaning of strictly secular is thus pluralist or inclusive in its widest sense.”

On appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada, Justice Gonthier (in dissent) but writing on a point of unanimous agreement for all nine judges in [Chamberlain v. Surrey School District](#) held that

... **nothing in the Charter, political or democratic theory, or a proper understanding of pluralism demands that atheistically based moral positions trump religiously based moral positions on matters of public policy.**

...

To summarize, to exclude from public square debates arguments about moral values that are based on religious beliefs would be a disaster, just as excluding the arguments that are based on secularist values would be. **Religion brings to bear important considerations that secularism doesn't, and vice versa.** We need to hear both sides and give proper weight to each, if we are to make wise decisions about the values that should take priority, when values are in conflict. And, as I explained, to exclude either set of arguments is anti-democratic.

Some **politicians** interpret the doctrine of separation of Church and State to claim that their own **personal views on what is and is not moral have no place in politics**, often in order to avoid standing up for what they believe is morally right, when they think that will lose them votes. That means they believe, as Michael Cook, editor of Mercatornet.com puts it, “that morality and politics have little to do with each other. In fact, political expediency should trump moral truths”. Surely, this is not a position that should be reassuring to the citizens whom these politicians represent, including as decision makers about issues that will affect our most important shared values.

The late Father John Neuhaus argued **democracy falters and human rights are imperiled** when liberalism loses its foundation in moral truth and open to the transcendent perspective of religious faith. Politics ceases to be the deliberation about how we ought to order our life together. It becomes instead a brutal contest in which who's weak and who's strong matter more than who's right and who's wrong.

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### **5. “MODES OF DELIVERY OF ‘PINK SLIPS’” TO RELIGIOUS VOICES IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE**

It is instructive to look at the **strategies of people who want to exclude religious voices from the public square.**

We could call these “modes of delivery of ‘pink slips’” to religious voices in the public square. They are not mutually exclusive, overlap and are often used cumulatively.

➤ First, **secularists deal with religious people to suppress their voices or views by using *ad hominem* attacks.**

A “derogatorily label the person and dismiss them on the basis of that label” approach is intentionally used as a strategy to suppress strong arguments against any secularist stance and, also, to avoid needing to deal with the opposing arguments. Examples include:

- Labeling persons as **religious** and, therefore, their views as **irrelevant** – the persons are dismissed on this basis, rather than dealing with their arguments.

- Labeling people as **politically incorrect**. Some politically correct positions, but not all by any means, conflict with some people’s religious and moral beliefs. Anyone who challenges the politically correct stance is, thereby, automatically labeled as intolerant, a bigot or hater. The substance of their arguments against a politically correct stance is not addressed; rather, people labeled as politically incorrect are, themselves, attacked as being intolerant and hateful simply for making those arguments and dismissed on that basis.

In short, political correctness operates by **shutting down non-politically correct people’s freedom of speech**.

- Similarly, while **intense tolerance** (which derives from the now ubiquitous **moral relativism**) is advocated, that tolerance is not extended to **politically incorrect views; they are not tolerated**. The façade of “tolerance” masks the intolerance involved and makes it difficult to object to political correctness as a suppression of freedom of speech, and also sometimes a suppression of freedom of religion and freedom of conscience.

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➤ Another strategy is to **characterize speech as a verbal act**. It is important to understand the nature of this strategy: For example, speaking against abortion or same-sex marriage is **not characterized as speech**; rather, it is characterized as a **sexist or discriminatory act** against women or homosexuals, respectively, and, therefore, as, in itself, a breach of human rights or, even, a hate crime. Consequently, it is argued that **protections of freedom of speech do not apply**.

➤ Another part of the same strategy is **to reduce to two the choices of position that are available**: One is either pro-choice on abortion and for respect for women and their rights or pro-life and against respect for women and their rights. The possibility of being pro-women and their rights and pro-life is eliminated.

The same approach is taken to same-sex marriage: One is against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and for same-sex marriage, or against same-sex marriage and for such discrimination. The option of being against such discrimination and against same-sex marriage, as I am, is eliminated.

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### **6. PLACING AND KEEPING SOCIAL-ETHICAL VALUES ISSUES IN A MORAL CONTEXT IN THE POLITICAL PUBLIC SQUARE**

I suggest that the **most important task of the religious voices in the public square is to place and keep social-ethical-values issues in a moral context**. It's a huge challenge, but crucial to maintaining ethics, in general, and with respect to issues such as I listed at the beginning of this address, in particular. A purely secular approach to establishing our collective values creates serious risks that a moral context will be lost. That is true because a **secular approach is usually based on utilitarian values and moral relativism, which can lead to a loss of a sense that a given issue raises moral concerns**.

John Ralston Saul calls history “human memory”. It is one of our main “human ways of knowing”. Religion should be seen as an important holder of our “**collective moral memory**”, a memory we lose or ignore at our peril.

We can see what happens when an issue loses its moral context by looking at what has happened with abortion.

Abortion is **always a moral and ethical issue** - or it should always be.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Reverend Rowan Williams, writing recently, in London, England’s The Observer, says however that we have lost our sense that abortion involves a “major moral choice” – it’s been “normalized” – “something has happened to our assumptions about the life of the unborn child, ...when one third of pregnancies in Europe end in abortion”.

In Canada, one quarter to one third of pregnancies end in abortion.

Abortion has gone **from being a rare exception to the norm**.

So we must consider **how can we place and keep issues such as abortion, euthanasia, new reproductive technologies, embryo stem cell research, and so on in a moral context**. Asked another way, how can we prevent the **moral callousness** that society has developed around respect for life?

We need to revalue religion, even if we are not people of Faith, to see it as a store of traditional knowledge and wisdom. Access to that knowledge and wisdom is more important than ever before in light of the possibilities opened up by the new technoscience, if we are to preserve the essence of our

humanness, which requires protecting our most important social-ethical values, especially that of respect for life.

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### **7. WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN**

At the heart of many of the current debates on ethics is the issue of whether humans deserve special respect as compared with animals or robots and whether we have absolute obligations to protect and preserve the essence of our humanness.

I believe we deserve special respect simply because we are human. But some people, many of them secular humanists, don't agree that there's anything intrinsically special about being human.

Rodney Brooks, a scientist specializing in artificial intelligence at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, criticizes the idea that human beings are "special" in any important way and therefore deserve respect of a different kind from machines or robots or, indeed, from animals which he, like Princeton animal rights philosopher Peter Singer, would not differentiate from humans in the kind of respect they are owed. So if we see it as acceptable to euthanize our suffering dog or cat, likewise, we should be able to offer euthanasia to humans.

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The traditional way in which we have expressed the **belief and moral intuition that humans are special**, and therefore deserve **special respect**, is through the **concept of soul** (for those who are religious in an Abrahamic tradition).

For those who are not religious, we can do the same through the idea of **human spirit** - a term I use in a religiously neutral sense, in that it can be accepted by people who or are not religious and those who are, and, if religious, no matter what their religion.

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Here's how I **define the human spirit**:

*It is the intangible, immeasurable, ineffable, numinous reality that all of us need to have access to find meaning in life and to make life worth living — a deeply intuitive sense of relatedness or connectedness to all life, especially other people, to the world, and to the universe in which we live; the metaphysical -- but not necessarily supernatural -- reality which we need to experience to live fully human lives.*

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The human spirit is the means through which we can experience **transcendence and perhaps transformation**. In other words, the **possession of soul or human spirit** is the way we establish a **difference in kind, not just in degree, between humans and other living entities** (wonder-inspiring as they are), and therefore a **difference in the kind of respect** owed to each.

But if we do not believe in a soul or that the human spirit means humans are different from other animals and machines, then there is **no basis** on which to argue humans deserve **special respect**.

**We become just another animal in the forest or just another robot in the laboratory.**

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### **8. TO SUMMARIZE**

- To exclude religious voices from the public square is anti-democratic, just as excluding secular voices would be. Both have a right to be heard.
- Religious voices have a valid and important role in decision making about social-ethical-legal values, the most important of which is to bring collective moral memory to bear on those decisions and, in doing so, to help to keep them in a moral context and to avoid moral callousness.
- Values conflicts cannot be solved by excluding religious voices from the public square. On the contrary, doing so is likely to exacerbate those conflicts.

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### **CONCLUSION**

I would like to conclude by quoting physician and ethicist Dr. Edmund Pellegrino, Chairman of the United States President's Council on Bioethics. In the last chapter of the council's report on "Human Dignity and Bioethics" he writes:

"Two contrary, but not necessarily contradictory, world views will dominate the discourse in our post-secular civilization. Two images of human dignity compete for moral authority. One is the scientific, the other the religious. Neither is likely to capitulate to the other. Is a productive dialogue and dialectic between these two world views possible, and how is it to be conducted?"

Extremists on both sides, militant atheists and intransigent dogmatists, insist there can be no common ground. More responsible proponents of both views hope for a productive dialogue and appeal

to the necessity of a common ground in the public arena, even while metaphysical foundations remain disputed.”

In other words, Pellegrino is arguing that religion has a valid role in the public square, a role on an equal footing with what he calls the scientific, but I'd call the secular, worldview. I agree with him. But to implement that duality, in practice, requires recognizing that religion and science are not antithetical, but, rather, they are different “ways of human knowing” that give us access to different forms of knowledge. The challenge is how to convince those who oppose religious voices in the public square that they are making a mistake in seeking to exclude them, and if religious voices are admitted, as they have a right to be, how to structure and engage in the dialogue that needs to ensue. I leave those issues for another address.

Finally, we need to extend the scope of our analyses of contemporary social-ethical-values issues beyond an **intense present** to consider the **needs and rights of future generations**.

And we must “**hold on trust**” for them, not just our physical world, but our metaphysical one – the values, principles, beliefs, stories and so on that create and represent the “human spirit”, that which makes us human.

Religious voices, not only, can help us to do that, but also, I believe, they are essential if we are to achieve that goal, and nothing is more important than that we do so.

Thank you.