

## Religion and Public Space

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Introductory Essay for the “Religion and Public Space” theme issue

Religious Studies and Theology

### Religion and Public Space

For over thirty years my research work at The Provincial Museum of Alberta has focused on the religious life through field studies delving into the shape and meaning of religious tradition in Western Canada and elsewhere. This has provided an ideal place in which to think about tradition and modernity and to consider religion and public space, for public museums in liberal democratic societies are living laboratories of this issue and they are often contested spaces. Exhibitions and other forms of publication sponsored by publicly funded museums are a lightning rod for a wide range of concerns, many of which hinge on how we understand the purpose of public space and what is legitimate and useful for consideration in that space. The politics of culture dominates the discussion in the decision-making process in museums.<sup>[i]</sup> The politics of the control of public space dominates the discussion within cultural communities when they, for one reason or another, begin to ask why some of what the community treasures in its self-understanding is excluded from consideration. Why are the interpretive projects in which the community participates so often hijacked by professionals who, having used their friendship and field research work to acquire knowledge and materials about the community, suddenly turn their backs and censor matters of the *cultus* at the heart of the very culture the professionals say they want to illuminate for the public?

The exhibition I initiated, *Anno Domini: Jesus Through the Centuries*, is discussed in several of the following papers. In preparation for that exhibition I came face to face with the play of religion and public space in contemporary society and with the struggle that ensues in Quebec, Sweden, France, and Turkey, among other places. However, this theme also crops up in daily life. Here I would like to survey examples of these issues from daily life in Edmonton, as a direct result of *Anno Domini*, and from my ongoing work at the Museum. These issues provide an introductory glimpse into the way the theme of religion and public space is at play in our institutions and in public debate (or its absence).

#### The Enduring Theme of Religion and Public Space

A number of incidents in Edmonton's daily life have highlighted the enduring character of this theme. For example, there was a vigorous debate in the media about how the City ought to mark places where fatal traffic accidents had taken place.<sup>[ii]</sup> First, signs showing a plain black cross on a white field were installed on lamp posts near the spot where a person was killed. Slowly letters to local papers began to appear, protesting the use of the cross for this purpose. The argument was that the cross is an explicit Christian symbol and therefore offends the public sensibility in a pluralistic society. Others countered that the cross is no longer explicitly Christian, since it has been used in the public sphere in a generic way for several generations. Some Christians argued their symbol should not be used this way since it is their prerogative to determine where and how the cross is used. Atheists declared they were offended by imposition of any religious symbol on the public. The faithful of various other religious traditions came

down on both sides of the argument. Finally, the City administration decided to use signs showing a black coffin on a white field, instead. The debate faded away as this “neutral” image took hold and became part of the civic furniture of Edmonton. Danger was marked without signifying any other dimension of tragedy and grief. The argument that respect for all faiths must be paramount had been used to strip a symbol from the public space.

Recently a related issue, more personal in character, has received considerable public attention. Family and friends, in the clutches of grief over the loss of a loved one on our city’s streets, have erected street-side memorials, often under cover of night.<sup>[iii]</sup> Usually flowers, teddy bears, or other personal items, along with notes, are taped to a near-by lamp post or placed on the median to mark the place of dying. Throughout the twentieth century, in parts of rural Alberta wayside crosses have been erected where such deaths have happened. In Europe this is a common and ancient practice. In Orthodox countries like Greece and Serbia, it is difficult to travel more than a short distance without passing a wayside shrine permanently placed where the ground has been sanctified by the death of a loved one. The shrine is usually a small icon to a favourite saint with a candle or votive lamp burning in front of the image. Fresh offerings of wheat, wine or oil are regularly placed in the shrine by those who come to remember their loved one. Their death does not end life but rather initiates acts of sacred memory and sanctifies the place of leaving this world.

The language of memory and the language of sanctification of place, however, played a very small role in the debate about whether memorials could be erected and maintained where death had claimed a person on the streets of Edmonton. Instead, the City’s administration argued for a clean look except for the sign of death, saying that the shrines would distract other drivers and prove a danger to public safety. The only real question was whether the memorials might perhaps be kept in place for a short period and then be removed by the City’s disposal agents. The unspoken concern seemed to be that the memory of death itself was a public danger<sup>[iv]</sup> and must be governed by a tight and proper procedure for the sake of public safety. Yet there was comparatively little substantial debate within City Council about the installation of floral advertisements on major expressways through the centre of the City and no concern that these were actually intended to attract the attention of drivers when they were travelling at speeds up to 100 km per hour in streams of traffic. In our modern liberal democratic society the lord of commerce trumps the lord of death with very little trouble.

The third example came to my attention as the result of a phone call from someone in the mayor’s office. A request had just come from a local Sikh organization requesting the City honour a major Sikh holy day, Baisakhi (13 or 14 April), with a declaration.<sup>[v]</sup> Such declarations have become customary in North American cities for such diverse events as Gay Pride Day and Holocaust Memorial Day. I was asked to explain Baisakhi and the status of the organization making the request. I asked the mayor’s office to send me a list of the days that had received this declaration in the past. It is striking that the list includes an impressive array of organizations and social causes but not one explicitly religious festival. While religious groups are obviously behind some of these organizations, they are masked by the cause whose public profile meant the request could not be refused.

This was only the latest in a series of struggles in Edmonton between the Sikh community and civil society. For a number of years the Sikh Federation of Edmonton has requested its own pavilion at the annual August Heritage Days festival.<sup>[vi]</sup> Each year the festival organizers have refused the request, claiming Sikhs are part of the Indian community and may participate in a common Indian pavilion. In the August 4, 1995, final edition of the *Edmonton Journal* an editorial noted that “Heritage is an embodiment of cultural tradition. Broadly speaking the 4 D’s — diet, dress, dance and dialect — constitute culture. It does not include religion. There can be many religions in a particular culture.” It went on to point out that the board of directors of Heritage Days refused a separate pavilion for the Sikh Federation

on the basis of religion. Despite the mayor's intervention, the Sikhs have remained outside the festival as the City lauds its promotion of "unity in diversity."

Several days before the call from the mayor's office another example of how we negotiate religion in public space came to my attention. I received an invitation to "a ceremony celebrating the Muslim festival of Eid-ul-Adha" to be held in the rotunda of the Alberta Legislative Assembly. The invitation came from the Honourable Ken Kowalski, then Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.<sup>[vii]</sup> I was not privy to the discussions that led the Speaker to host this ceremony and to make it an annual event, but several things are apparent. The Honourable Larry Shaban was elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1975, and became the first Muslim to serve as a cabinet minister in Canada. Several others have been elected since to both the Provincial and Federal assemblies. In Alberta, the Muslim members of the legislative assembly are part of the Ismaili community. Members of the Ismaili community hold key positions in the civil service and this community has shown considerable initiative in bringing various Muslim communities as well as the general public together for charitable events such as the annual Partnership Walk. The cumulative effect seems to have prepared the way for civil recognition of Eid-ul-Adha.

There is another remarkable example of the entrance of religion into the public square. I learned of it a number of years ago when I first did field research work in the Jodo Shinshu community in Raymond Alberta.<sup>[viii]</sup> The Japanese Buddhist community made its annual pilgrimage through the streets of Raymond to the town cemetery for the Obon festival, the major Japanese and Buddhist festival for the memory of the ancestors. This community was established in Raymond early in the twentieth century and grew substantially as a result of the evacuation of the Japanese under the War Measures Act (1914) during the Second World War. They had built a columbarium for the ashes of their friends and relatives and it was here that many of the ashes of those who died during the internment were sent. Consequently, the cemetery has national importance for the Japanese community. The community gathered at the columbarium for their Obon service of thanksgiving and then danced the Obon adore with the spirit of their ancestors back down the main street of Raymond to the Buddhist Church, at the edge of the shopping district of the town.

The Obon adore is a colourful processional dance and it had long attracted the attention of the population of Raymond. In the mid 1970s the town councillors asked Makio Nishiyama, a local businessman and community representative, if the Japanese community would be willing to share their day of memory and visiting the cemetery with the town. They thought that this would be a good time for the town to declare a cemetery day. The Japanese community was charmed by the suggestion and the Raymond cemetery day became a local civil celebration. Raymond is a homogeneous town founded in the late 1890s by Mormons fleeing from the laws against polygamy in the United States. The only other group of people living in Raymond is the Japanese community, and they had acquired a Mormon church building when the Mormons out-grew it and built a larger one. The Mormon faith has a cult of the ancestor and this, in my view, prepared them for and interested them in the Japanese Buddhist festival of Obon. In the public space of the cemetery, Jodo Shinshu Buddhist tradition and Mormon regard for those who have left this life meet. The way Buddhists give shape and form to the memory of those who have left this life encouraged their fellow citizens to give modest collective shape to their regard for the dead. Here we have a contribution to civil and public practice by a small but well integrated Buddhist community in rural Alberta.

### Amnesia as Civil Virtue

In 1998 I went to Quebec to spend time in the large houses of religious women established with the

founding of Quebec as a civil society.<sup>[ix]</sup> I wanted to understand the religious vocation of the women for whom these houses were home. What was their connection to the founder of the community and how was this embodied in local living tradition? Perhaps I might hear the echo of the seventeenth century and the period between Pierre de Bérulle's birth (1575) and Jean Eudes' death (1680), a period in which there was a seismic transformation in Europe in politics, economics, culture, and religion.<sup>[x]</sup> It was in this period that the French School of spirituality was forged and it was in these houses of religious women that this tradition took shape and transformed religious life with a new sense of civil responsibility and purpose. I wanted to see how this particular religious vision sat in the context of twentieth-century North America on the eve of the third Christian millennium. Here, perhaps, I could catch a glimpse of the seventeenth century and the twentieth century held together, of religious life at the foundations of the modern civil society of Quebec. It was also my first piece of field research for the *Anno Domini* exhibition.

Walking the halls of the Hospitallers of St. Joseph, the Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Montréal, and the Ursulines in Montreal and Quebec, visiting the crypts and chapels, and joining the sisters in their dining rooms, I found the seventeenth century is never far and the remarkable women who founded these communities remain a lively presence. In the traditions of the house and in the memory and thought of many of the sisters, the furnishings of the mind and heart shaped in the seventeenth century and the struggles in both the religious and civil life are part of the working vocabulary in discussions about vocation, mission, and the religious dimensions of civil life. I was taken to the crypt in the Hôtel-Dieu in Montreal to be in the presence of the relics of Jeanne Mance (1606–1673), the founder. She had come from France with the first settlers in hopes of establishing a utopian society on Montreal Island at Ville-Marie in 1641. Together with Paul de Maisonneuve, the first governor of Ville-Marie, she laid the foundations for a new civil society in the new world. A few years later she brought the Sisters Hospitallers from La Fleche in Anjou to staff her hospital.

Two years earlier Marie Guyart (1599–1672), whom we know as the mystic Marie de l'Incarnation, founded the Ursuline convent in Quebec City. She is described as a spiritually precocious child. Her husband died only two years after they were married, leaving her with a month-old son and a bankrupt business. Urged to remarry by family and friends she withdrew into secluded meditation and prayer, and on March 24, 1620, experienced a mystical and emotional "conversion." She entered the Ursuline cloister at Tours, took vows in 1633, and taught theology for six years. Her *Vita* tells us that her regular reading of *Les Relations des jésuites* and a series of visions compelled her to come to Canada to establish a religious house for women and devote herself to the education of girls. She landed in Quebec with three Ursuline sisters and Mme de la Petrie on August 1, 1639, and established a convent in the lower town and various schools for the education of French and Indian girls. She wrote numerous theological and spiritual treatises, an Iroquois catechism, and Algonquian and Iroquois dictionaries, as well as engaging in the forging of the new society in Quebec.

The third remarkable woman from France who stands at the foundations of Quebec civil society is Marguerite Bourgeoys (1620–1700), founder of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Montréal. She had joined a non-cloistered congregation of teachers attached to a convent in Troyes under the direction of the sister of Governor de Maisonneuve of Ville-Marie. She sailed to Canada in 1657 and a year later opened a girl's school in a stable on Montreal Island. Besides chaperoning girls sent from France as brides for settlers (*filles du roi*), she recruited French and Canadian girls as teachers. She organized a boarding school for girls in Montreal and a school for Indian girls on the Sulpician reserve of La Montagne. On July 1, 1698, the secular sisters she led took simple vows and became a recognized non-cloistered religious community. She was revered by the colonists when she died, and on October 31, 1982, became Canada's first saint.

I could easily add other names to this list of religious women who established the civil institutions

of Quebec. Indeed, after spending a few days in the houses of religious women in Montreal and Quebec it seemed obvious to me that Quebec as a society was founded because of the religious vocation and particular civil vision of the women and men who first built it. Here religion and public space were one and the same. While I was in Quebec visiting these religious houses I met a colleague who was preparing a new and prestigious exhibition for the Musée de la civilisation in Quebec. The exhibition, *Femme, corps et âme* (Women, body and soul) explored a set of women's issues and the nature of the feminine in the Quebec context. We talked at length about her interesting work and, after a time, I asked where and how the founding women of Quebec civil society fit into the picture. Although she was not completely ignorant of these women, it had not occurred to her or the planning team that there was a relationship between the theme of their exhibition, driven by the modern women's movement, and the founding of Quebec. Indeed, with the Quiet Revolution in Quebec and the rather late establishment of a secular society, it had become problematic to speak about the religious patrimony of Quebec at all. She asked me how I understood this chapter in Quebec's history and culture and we talked for several hours about it. However, it was too late for our conversation to have any impact on the exhibition. I was astonished at this manifestation of amnesia, particularly because it seemed like a unique opportunity to serve the women's movement and popular knowledge. Quebec is the only society I know of where the civil life was clearly established by the work of religious women.

### The Mystery of Death and Public Grief

Olof Palme, the Prime Minister of Sweden, was assassinated on February 28, 1986, as he walked with his wife, Lisbet, along Sveavagen, Stockholm's well-lit main thoroughfare. They were out for a stroll after seeing *The Brothers Mozart*, a new Swedish film being shown in a downtown cinema. Palme seemed to have relished the fact that he didn't feel the need for armed guards as so many other European dignitaries did. One man, Christer Pettersson, was charged with the assassination, but the charge was dropped because of insufficient evidence. Since that time, a range of conspiracy theories involving the Swedish government, the CIA, the Kurds, and, most notably, the South Africans, have emerged. No one has yet been convicted of the murder.

Enormous grief swept Sweden and the political left throughout Europe was astonished at his assassination and by what might have motivated it. This was the last country in Europe where assassination of a government official was anticipated. Over the next months thousands of Swedes came to the place where Palme died. They brought flowers, wrote letters, placed votive candles, stood, knelt, and wept. About 200 metres across the street, in the Adolf Fredriks kyrka, Palme was buried and special fences had to be installed for crowd control. A week after his burial, when I visited Stockholm, the mound of flowers, letters, and candles was five feet high, completely covering his grave and spilling over onto surrounding graves. In churches throughout Sweden, from small villages in Samiland in the far north to the cathedral in Stockholm, requiems were played and sung for what journalists came to call the canonization of the first socialist saint.

Sweden was in the grip of another great grief eight years later. On September 28, 1994, the *Estonia*, a large ferry boat, sank in the Baltic Sea and 852 people perished. Most were Swedes returning home. I was there to do work in Vilhelmina, a town in South Lapland, where the regional high school is located. The whole region was mourning the loss of a sports team, the coach, and principal of the school. The first day after it was confirmed that there were no survivors, colleagues and families gathered at the Church House<sup>[xi]</sup> and grief counsellors arrived from the south to talk with them. On the second day, religious language was added to the language of therapy as 500 students and the staff of the school walked three blocks up the hill in the centre of Vilhelmina to the state church. This was the beginning of twenty days of memorial services, each held at one o'clock. The church was built 200 years ago and sits on a

hill in a lovely cemetery where local people have been buried since the Swedish settlement of the region. During the last 50 years, 15 or 20 people might attend services on a Sunday and, except for baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and burials, the church with its more than 400 seats is largely empty. On the Tuesday I attended, seven days after the tragedy, the aisles, foyer, and choir were packed, and students, many of whom had perhaps heard their grandparents sing the Swedish hymn *Tryggare kan ingen vara*<sup>[xii]</sup> of Lina Sandell (1832–1903) but never sung it themselves, joined their voices in its plaintive expression of grief and hope:

*Children of the heavenly Father  
Safely to his bosom gather;  
Nestling bird nor star in heaven  
Such a refuge e'er was given.*

*God his own doth tend and nourish,  
In his holy courts they flourish;  
From all evil things he spares them,  
In his mighty arms he bears them.*

*Neither life nor death shall ever  
From the Lord his children sever;  
Unto them his grace he showeth,  
And their sorrows all he knoweth.*

*My field research on Swedish religious life led me to talk with clergy and lay leadership within all the churches in Vilhelmina: the state Lutheran Church; the Pentecostal Church; Svenska Missionsförbundet, founded early in the twentieth century as a result of the Pietist movement; the Free Church, split from the Missionsförbundet; and The Word of Light Church, developed from the recent arrival of a fundamentalist movement from America that promoted a gospel of success created by the Christian Businessmen's Association. The tragedy of the Estonia hung like a shadow over our conversations. The spokespersons for the Free Churches discussed the loss with compassion and an explanation. They sought to make sense of the loss through their theological and social critic perspective. The loss was God's judgment on Swedish society or God's call to Swedish people who needed to deepen their faith and relationship to the divine. Within the terror of history was a message needing to be heard and past failures or past rejections of the divine will had led directly to the loss in the Baltic. The state Lutheran clergy responded differently. They were immediately engaged, through the Church House and their role as chaplain at the school, in fielding the grief and horror that riveted the community. Because they represented the nation of Sweden they were free to invite the whole community to the daily service of memory. Because they were guardians of a common spiritual tradition they had a language for grief and for national grief and did not seek to explain the tragedy in terms of personal or national failure or the actions of God.*

*One of the issues I had come to explore was the decision by the Swedish Parliament to disestablish the state church with the advent of the year 2000. Four years earlier an all-party committee of the Parliament had initiated a study of the implications of disestablishing the Church. The Swedish Church was the primary record keeper of census data and had been so since the Middle Ages. It cared for cemeteries and hundreds of churches were historic sites central to national and local identity. The Church was also a local manifestation of government presence and a bulwark of local knowledge and local identity. The national issues were easily addressed by the committee's study but the issues of local identity were much harder to address. The initial study had recommended disestablishment, set the date for 2000,*

*and was well into resolving questions of process when the Estonia went down.*

*Three streams of interest met around the disestablishment of the Church. The initial impetus came from Church authorities and clergy. The Swedish Church has played a formative and active role in the World Council of Churches (WCC). Increasingly, the representatives had felt hamstrung by their status as civil servants when the WCC developed resolutions on political and social justice issues brought before them. As clergy they were eager to support many of these resolutions. As civil servants they were on uncertain ground. The second group was the Free Churches of Sweden, which had since their inception argued for the dissolution of the state Church. On theological grounds they saw it as Constantinian and rejected it on principle, and on political grounds they thought the state Church had an unfair advantage in the emerging free market of religion. The third force was the secularists. This constituency, certainly the largest, had argued for half a century that the state was no longer Christian and so there should be no established Church. Furthermore, Sweden was well on the way to becoming a pluralistic society as the home of Muslim refugees and many displaced Africans who cover the religious spectrum from animists to communist atheist, from evangelical Christian to devout Muslim. A mature liberal democratic society, they argued, must let go of the religious dimension of its cultural patrimony now that it had entered the age of globalization.*

*By 1994 the sole dissent I heard came from a surprising place. A handful of scholars, who care for the Swedish cultural patrimony although they are largely non-believers, were joined by political opponents of globalization, because they realized that the disestablishment of the Church would likely be the death knell of an already suffering local culture. Who did the bishops think they were, promoting actions that harmed Swedish local life? Here is an example of how the public space changes incrementally with the process of development and modernization until a point comes when a central public institution is removed from the public sphere. One would be hard pressed to find an institution in Sweden that was so deeply a part of the public world as the Church prior to the last fifty years. On New Year's Eve the celebration of the second millennium of Christian tradition in Sweden culminated in moving the Church of Sweden from the centre of the public square it had occupied for a millennium to a sphere solely defined by corporate interest. The weight of Swedish culture visibly lightened and the embodiment of Swedish cultural memory visibly thinned.*

*When the Estonia sank, who in Sweden could give voice to national grief? From what quarter could Sweden draw a language sufficiently large, inclusive, and deep to shape a society's sorrow? Sweden is overloaded with volunteer organizations, unions, and associations of every description. They all speak on behalf of interest groups, have a rich language of protest, and little or no language for sorrow. The Free Churches speak for intentional Christians and do so within the framework of protest and prophetic criticism of Swedish society. Only the Church of Sweden, as guardian of the cultus that has stood at the centre of Swedish culture for 1,000 years, could speak as it did on behalf of all Swedes and to their common sorrow. The irony of this slowly dawned on me through my conversations with Swedish clergy and scholars in Vilhelmina, Uppsala, and Stockholm. We began to talk about it, and when I was at the airport some days later leaving for Canada, I read a column in one of the leading Swedish papers that also took note of this irony. It was written by a leading journalist who played some role in the process leading to the disestablishment of the Church. As I remember, she affirmed her atheism and her commitment to the process that would culminate on New Year's Eve in 2000. Yet, she said, it had struck her profoundly during the wake of the Estonia tragedy that there was no one to speak for Sweden and no way for Swedes to speak together of this sorrow except through the Church of Sweden. Our volunteer organizations and the Free Churches, she noted, speak only for their interest groups. Here we have a national sorrow and, much to her surprise, since she had never considered such a role for the Church, a national Church that can, does, and must help us express our common sorrow. As I read her remarks and thought of my conversations around this matter, I could not help but think of how the public*

*square and the common good have been served in traditional society in ways we moderns simply have no language for. Such experiences do not end, but the depth of our engagement with them and the solidarity they forge shrink in the modern liberal democratic society.*

### *The Collision Between Memory and Tradition*

*Cultural memory and living tradition often collide and do so in the public square when memory is embodied and the living tradition takes a turn. In the later 1970s, on my first visit to Sweden, I asked my host, Thomas Heinemann, Keeper of the University of Uppsala Collections, to show me Uppsala Cathedral so that I could pay my respects to the memory of Archbishop Nathan Söderblom, whose bones lie near the altar. We entered this late medieval building in the mid-afternoon and I knelt on the great scholar's grave, prompted by my gratitude for his book, *The Living God: Basal Forms of Personal Religion*, which had moved me as a young student.*

*Some years later I learned from Jaroslav Pelikan that when Krister Stendahl became Bishop of Stockholm he invited His Holiness John Paul II to visit Sweden. The Pope, too, made a request to see Söderblom's grave, referring to him as a great churchman. From Arlanda airport the Pope's motorcade moved to Uppsala making its first stop at the Cathedral. His Holiness entered through its great doors, making the sign of the cross and blessing the gathering as he walked immediately to the bema. He knelt on Söderblom's burial stone, touching it, and lingering in prayer. Then he rose and took his seat. Stendahl introduced him with words that went something like this. "In 1932 our Bishop Nathan Söderblom with others initiated the first ecumenical gathering under the banner of Faith and Order. This was the foundation of what has come to be the World Council of Churches. He called Protestants from around the world to gather here at Uppsala Cathedral. He invited the Pope of Rome and the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople to come and join in reflecting on the church in the twentieth century and what might be the common tasks. The Pope from Peter's see did not come. The Ecumenical Patriarch from that wing of the Church that holds the Apostle John dearly in its heart came. When Söderblom welcomed the gathering he said that the Apostle Paul had always been among Lutherans in Sweden and that John had now come in the form of the Ecumenical Patriarch. Yet, sadly, we awaited the arrival of Peter." The Pope sat just a few feet from Stendahl as he spoke these words and the largely Swedish audience, audibly embarrassed at this comment in the presence of John Paul II. Then Stendahl, with his wry smile and his wall-eye looking heavenward, continued: "And now Peter has come, as John Paul." Cathedrals in traditional Christian culture are public spaces for the play of the living tradition and they abound in layer upon layer of memory, sacred and otherwise. Pilgrims have always known this. The modern tourist industry struggles with both sides of the matter, often endangering the remnant of memory and disrupting the living tradition with its success. On that day of the papal visit, memory and tradition were both at play, both honoured, both augmented.*

*In the 1970s Thomas Heinemann<sup>[xiii]</sup> had worked in the building next to the Uppsala Cathedral. As keeper of the University collections he had an interest in the integrity of the Cathedral. As we slowly moved along the west aisle lingering over the sarcophagus of king and queen, Thomas talked of the history of the building and a recent episode in which he played what I came to learn was a significant role. It was a story of the conflict between cultural memory and living tradition, a theme in any survey of religion and public space. One day in the fall of 1970, Thomas walked into Uppsala Cathedral to find a restoration project was underway. He was told that a decision had been made to restore several architectural features as well as the interior decorative program of the Cathedral to its original form. The Cathedral, as is always the case in buildings charged with the weight of cultural memory for a community, had accrued various layers of decoration over the centuries, the last one being a set of late nineteenth-century neo-Gothic paintings in the upper galleries. These were being stripped away along*

*with the historical paintings in the various chapels that run along both aisles.*

*Uppsala Cathedral is the Westminster Abbey of Sweden. It is the cache of memory for close to 1,000 years of Swedish history. A regular cycle of concerts is performed there throughout the year and broadcast by Swedish radio and television. Recordings are often produced in this stone building. It remains a place of state ceremony and of university and local ceremony. Nothing in Uppsala rises higher than the twin towers of the Cathedral, not even the dome on the palace of Queen Christina, daughter of Gustavus Adolphus, who abdicated in 1654 and became a Roman Catholic. Accompanied by Thomas or other educated Swedes one could linger for days in its precincts and learn and be touched by the lion's share of Swedish history and culture.*

*Nonetheless, Sweden had become such a thoroughly secular society that for years, the regular Sunday worship service at Uppsala Cathedral had drawn only a handful of faithful. In the late 1960s a number of those faithful were influenced by the renaissance of the living liturgical tradition that swept the Roman Catholic Church and through ecumenical meetings made inroads into various Protestant churches. The followers of this movement eschewed the triumphal ethos that had shaped the liturgical life of cathedrals up to the Second Vatican Council. Simplicity and lay participation in the liturgy, simplicity in vestments and altar furnishings, led to the reshaping of thousands upon thousands of churches across the Catholic and Protestant world. The small congregation in Uppsala Cathedral set about reordering the sacred space by stripping the neo-Gothic imagery from the galleries and side aisles. They moved the magnificent medieval carved altar and crucifix to a side chapel and placed grille work to define their new holy of holies, a small space with a moveable altar and pulpit in the centre of this cruciform church where the transepts cross the main part of the nave. They made a "house church" for the faithful within the Cathedral. There was also another interest group committed to stripping the cultural memory from Uppsala Cathedral. A group of architects and art historians had discussed for some time the question of historical accuracy and integrity in the Cathedral and the virtue of returning the interior decorative program to its original form, thought to be more appropriate to the architectural character of the building. For them, the key issue was a notion of authenticity guided by historical period and aesthetic school.*

*The past is messy and uneven. The small group of faithful, wanting to recover an authentic Christian life in the spirit of simplicity, and the art historians, wanting to uncover the previous conception of the Cathedral, both in its architectural shape and its decorative and iconic patterns, made common cause in the stripping of cultural memory from what is surely one of the foremost public places of cultural memory in Sweden. Thomas Heinemann marshaled his students and prepared an exhibition on the Cathedral, explicating its generations of cultural memory and arguing for the adding of layers rather than the stripping of layers, for a model of care rather than a model of purity. A debate was initiated as a result of his intervention and the project was stopped after the stripping of neo-Gothic works from the interior walls. The demarcation of the new intimate house-church in the centre of the nave was changed to be less intrusive than what was originally planned, but the large medieval cross that had graced the Cathedral for countless generations was simply sawed up and discarded, and the carved altar finally found a resting place in a side chapel to the east of the original altar area.*

*Thomas Heinemann loves the Cathedral through which he walked weekly and where he attended various festivities, including regular music concerts. His work on behalf of the preservation of the Cathedral exercised him to the point that he ran for public office under the auspices of Communist Party and served three terms on the Kultur Nämnden, the Cultural Committee of the Uppsala Commune. He cared for the cultural memory of Sweden and was able to marshal the support of two politicians to counter the Church leadership and the art historians. The two parliamentarians were from opposite parties, one from the right and the other a Social Democrat. In the modern world cultural memory and living tradition collide in curious ways in the public square and addressing these issues makes for new*

bedfellows.

### *Religion, Public Space, and the New Pluralism*

*Pluralism is deepening in many modern democratic societies. Peoples from various places with their particular faiths are living under a common civil canopy. We are faced with an enormous challenge to rethink this civil canopy in light of pluralism. We are faced with the challenge to rethink the religious dimensions of life under the civil canopy and find a way for the public space within society to affirm and nurture the deeper dimensions of culture. Failure to do so will simply nurture cultural amnesia. Two final examples from my work on Anno Domini highlighted this twenty-first-century challenge.*

*Early in the year 2000 I went to Turkey to visit the sites of the Eastern Christian Empire, Byzantium, as part of the development of Anno Domini. It was the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's (1881–1938) thorough-going revolution that transformed all aspects of society from 1922 to 1925 and beyond. Banners with Ataturk's image flew from virtually every building and lamp post around the Sultanamet and the papers were full of praise for the accomplishments of the modern Turkish state. It was a secular state and this was to be prized above all else. Shortly before my arrival new legislation had been passed prohibiting university entrance or government employment to any woman wearing the head-covering customary in the Islamic world. Similar legislation had been introduced in France and in Quebec. The argument was that such coverings are an indignity to women and must be prohibited in public spaces controlled and funded by the state.*

*Similarly, during my negotiations to borrow artistic works from France for Anno Domini, I learned that permission to borrow must first be sought from the curator and conservators of each national institution. Once that was granted and the dates for the loan committed, a request had to be made to a national committee. It was this committee's responsibility to answer the question: "Does France wish to have its cultural treasures present in the particular exhibition for which they were requested?" It became clear that this committee was a national censorship committee. My request to borrow artistic works for an exhibition for the advent of the third millennium of Christianity, an exhibition exploring the meaning of Jesus, Jesus' teaching, and what has been made of it in human culture over 2,000 years would have very little chance of approval. The shadow of the French Revolution has not lifted and the French government remains determined to hold religion, particularly Roman Catholicism and its memory, in check. These two examples are among the many that bear witness to the secular colonization of the religious dimension of human culture.*

*Mircea Eliade wrote about a new humanism,<sup>[xiv]</sup> in which a regard for the religious dimension of human consciousness would be recognized and integrated into the civil life of the modern democratic state. In thirty years of work and study on the religious life in the twentieth century and on questions of modernity and tradition and their impact on communities and the human spirit, I have come to see his concerns and his argument as one of paramount importance. One of the great questions liberal democratic societies will not be able to ignore in the twenty-first century is how to shape a civil canopy in light of pluralism and to guarantee freedom of religion. Such a guarantee is one of the ultimate civil values under the various human rights charters layered into law over the last half-century. Conventional approaches to liberalism and secularism have made this reconciliation particularly difficult and the emerging pattern of legal cases in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia highlight the challenge. For the better part of 300 years we have experimented with forms of secularism that banish religious sensibilities and values from the public square. Benjamin L. Berger, a former student of mine, has recently argued that these conventional approaches have given us a "conceptually unsatisfying vision of an areligious and hyper-rational public space devoid of moral commitment." Through a study of case*

*law in the Canadian context he notes that “liberal theorists have failed to fully appreciate the nature and demands of religious conscience” and we need to develop an understanding of the relationship between liberalism, secularism, and religious conscience consisting of “a mediated pluralism premised upon a language of civic value” comprehensive and subtle enough to “give substance to religious freedom while maintaining due regard for the common good and the gifts of secular liberalism.”<sup>[xv]</sup>*

*If we were to mature beyond a public square created, in part, by the banishing of religious values to a public square informed by a due regard for the gifts of religious life, the common good, and the gifts of secular liberalism, how would the various issues surveyed in this article play out? What might the implications be for culture, community, and the human spirit? Certainly the memory of death and the sanctification of the place of dying would be recognized within the public space, even of a thoroughly modern city such as Edmonton. The largely Mormon town council of Raymond, Alberta, and its Japanese Buddhist citizens model a way of regarding public space that recognizes the substantive character of the religious life. A conceptual framework in which the cultus at the heart of culture was restored to public discourse would make it much more difficult to manipulate the politics of heritage. Sikhs and other communities would find their place in public festivities and the public square and the “diversity in unity” so loudly touted would actually have substance. The recognition of Eid-ul-Adha by the Alberta legislature points a way to this end. Where cultural memory and living tradition collide, the capacity to discuss these demanding issues would mature beyond simple dialectical opposites. In the context of hard won freedoms and new public status, such as that of women in Quebec, an enormous civil virtue, the framework for considering women would also include an ability to see the gifts of the past in a way that deepens the identity of the modern civil society. In Raymond, Alberta, and at the Alberta Legislative Assembly on the date of the great Muslim festival, some progress has been made towards this new humanism. In France and Turkey, as well as many other places, there remains considerable work before the modern state matures to a form of pluralism that takes the “cult” of culture seriously. Religious studies scholars have a role to play in this process of maturation.<sup>[xvii]</sup> It falls to them to take up the theme of religion and public space in light of the new pluralism and provide the modern liberal democratic state with ways of understanding faith and religious tradition so a mediated pluralism can develop within civil life and a new humanism reshape modern culture.*

[i] The literature on museums and the politics of culture has grown enormously over the last fifteen years. Of particular note are: Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); *Exhibiting Cultures, The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Peter Mason, *Deconstructing America: Representations of the Other* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990); and Moira G. Simpson *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

[ii] The debate began in the *Edmonton Journal* on January 16, 1990, describing the new placement of signs as a “grim reminder at the scenes of traffic deaths in an effort to promote safer driving.”

[iii] From January to June of 2002 this debate occupied space in the *Edmonton Journal* as well as considerable air time on local talk shows.

[iv] Here is another example of what the anthropologist Mary Douglas discusses in her book *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966.)

[v] Baisakhi is the first festival in the Sikh calendar and reminds the faithful of March 30, 1699, when Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth guru, called all Sikhs to gather at Anandpur. He introduced his followers to a new concept of loyalty and initiation embodied in the ideals of the Khalsa. This day marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Sikhism.

[vi] This debate has continued since July 24, 1984, when the Sikh Federation was first refused a pavilion during Heritage Days and called for a boycott. The Sikh arguments recorded in the

*Edmonton Journal* on July 24 and following days made the case for this action having its roots in the Council of Indian Societies that had gained the ear of the organizers and framed the discourse in such a way to exclude them. For many Sikhs it was a small local action that had echoes of the community's struggle in India.

[vii] Eid-ul-Adha, the festival of sacrifice, is also called the Great Festival, because the celebration lasts four days, a day longer than any other major festival of Islam. This is when pilgrims to Mecca for the *hajj* offer animals at the small village of Mina on their way back to Mecca from Mount Arafat. It is in this village that they "remember the willingness of the prophet Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Ismael to God." See *Festivals in World Religions*, edited by Alan Brown (London and New York: Longman, 1986):224-27.

[viii] David J. Goa and Harold G. Coward, "Sacred Ritual, Sacred Language: Jodo Shinshu Religious Forms in Transition," in *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, volume 12, number 4 (1983).

[ix] Michel Thériault, *The Institutes of Consecrated Life in Canada from the Beginning of New France up to the Present: Historical Notes and References/Les instituts de vie consacrée au Canada depuis les débuts de la Nouvelle-France jusq' à aujourd'hui: notes historiques et références* (Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1980).

[x] Two outstanding studies of this period have been done recently: Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990) and Patricia Simpson, *Marguerite Bourgeoys and Montreal, 1640-1665* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997).

[xi] The Church House is an institution specific to the Swedish state church. It is a community gathering place located in the town and used for religious, civic, and social purposes.

[xii] *The English translation of this hymn is titled "Children of the Heavenly Father." I have quoted it from The Covenant Hymnal (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1973), hymn number 382, translated by Ernst W. Olson.*

[xiii] Thomas Heinemann, who is Jewish, had come to southern Sweden as a child. His father moved his law practice from Germany to Switzerland in 1936. The rise of Nazism continued and that is how the family came to make its home in Sweden, surviving as agricultural labourers during the war years. Thomas studied art history, writing his dissertation on the iconographic programs in several of the small medieval parish churches in the region of Uppland. His love and affection for these elegant white stone churches has remained throughout the years and it was through such early studies that his formation as a "keeper" of the cultural memory of Sweden took place.

[xiv] Mircea Eliade, *The Quest, History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969):1-11.

[xv] *Canadian Journal of Law and Society/Revue canadienne de droit et société*, volume 17 (2002):39-68.

[xvi] For a consideration of the work of religious studies scholars as public scholars see Delwin Brown, *Boundaries of Our Habitations: Tradition and Theological Construction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), and William D. Dean, *The Religious Critic in American Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).