

**Elizabeth M. Bounds:**

**Coming Together/Coming Apart: religion, Community and Modernity.**  
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## **1. Chaos or Community**

### **A: Why Community?**

“we can never again live apart, [so we] must learn somehow to live with each other in peace”,  
MLK.

“Community”, a vague but powerfully suggestive term. Suggesting -

- a. a desire for personal relationship as opposed to usual and forced social roles.
- b. a need to stand together against a confusing and/or hostile world.
- c. a hope that there is something bigger than self which gives meaning.
- d. a wish to return to the old ways or traditions.
- e. an intention to create a new order to stand against the old which denies my group/ self.
- f. a desire for political inclusion and participation.

Our time of social and geographical mobility, lost traditions and pluralism. Reaction to globalisation? So yearning for community can be for liberation or tradition reinforcement. Liberals are accused of pursuing own interests in a neutral state, Communitarians argue that it is better to work for ‘goods’ within particular communal practices.

Privatisation of Religion: necessary in the liberal mind to set other matters ‘free’ from moral constraint. Yet religion in USA has held on amongst educated affluent and charismatic among less affluent, despite this and provides a moral backbone. Even non-religious look to religion to solve dislocation and alienation. So Church provides ‘community’ to be lived out and a transcendent sense of meaning. But remember that religion can also include exclusionary hierarchies.

Community is usually connected to a claim to power. Community’s demise is reported by professional-managerial class (they are losing community as a claim to power as dominance) but maybe others’ community is not so vanquished. Marginalised groups may feel strong sense of community in resistance to power.

Is some form of public morality possible? Some will argue for a homogeneous social morality others for a solidarity based upon the recognition of difference.

Capitalism, liberalism and modernity are interrelated (Capitalist economy, bolstered by liberal polity and a culture of modernity) Community is argued through as reaction to the outcome of these vectors. Take this further now:

## **B. Community and Civil Society**

After Habermas:

Taking Civil Society (or Lifeworld) to mean the public sphere distinct from market and state.  
- The symbolic, communicative world in which we find our identities (both in the private and public spheres) It has three major components:

1. Culture (mutual understanding)
2. Society (coordinating action) and
3. Personalities (socialisation)

These acting together produce social consensus which shapes our view of the world and gives us a place within it. It is this civil world which is then threatened by economic and state structures.

Liberal political discourse, for example, excluded the 'private' realms of religion, family, and marginalised cultures. We now believe however that politics and economy is not extensive with cultural community. All struggles against oppression in the modern world begin by redefining what had previously been considered private, non-political issues now as matters of public concern for justice and legitimate power. Post-modernism has allowed us to put the private and public back together.

Modernity (including as above, capitalism and liberalism) has given us reason, scientific disciplines, emancipation from traditions, political freedoms, valuing of the human and the just plus vast material benefits. However, it was won through massive exploitation, and institutional dependence and domination (class, gender roles, political inequalities) which created 'voluntary' acceptance of the system. The social exclusions were not identical (white working-class men, middle-class women, people of colour) and therefore inclusion cannot be simply "add X in" but profound restructuring of the system. To include women in the public sphere means fundamental change since their 'rôle' was to create harmony in home whilst separated from men's harsh encounter with power and conflict outside.

### **Liberal Protestantism**

Protestant Churches have lost (with the rise of enlightenment and capitalism) their place as custodians for the dominant American culture. No longer civic cement or vital 'community'. Now also various styles of Church culture have emerged quite distinct from the mainstream WASP. Old notions now untenable.

### **Materialist Method**

Morality is a social glue that lets people get on with their lives. Foucault has shown that power is not uni-dimensional, but something which circulates.. it is never in anybody's hands.. individuals are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power.

So we are considering 'community' as an ideological discourse, designed to engage power relations in civil society. Morality likewise can serve to legitimate the power of particular groups, as if to the benefit of all. Gramsci saw civil society as an arena of struggle for hegemony or domination, often brought about non-violently by institutions such as Church, family, schooling, asking us to see our fractured world as a smooth seamless whole. However, underneath that veneer is great conflict and volatility and so hegemony is maintained through manipulation, compromise and force. Difficult sometimes to know what are dominant cultural characteristics but which are new or very old and anti-cultural characteristics.

**Pluralism reduces us** to being an other among others - it is not a recognition but a reduction of difference to absolute indifference and interchangeability. So in pluralism we see the distinctions but do not recognise the communities out of which they come.

Benhabib argues that we have not lost sense of belonging so much as a loss of sense of political agency and efficacy

### **Theory of Community and culture as harmony or conflict?**

Stress on meaning offers a liberal notion of culture as opposed to seeing culture in the participationist view as a jockeying for power or state hegemony- an ongoing process of conflict and negotiation of differences with no simple fixed traditions or identities. There is a nostalgia evident in hopes for *Gemeinschaft* which looks to some sort of golden age of harmony and 'community'. Especially consider 'family', the archetypal haven, where gender roles are traditionalist.

So, judge a theory of community on two factors: politics and culture.

1. does it exclude conflict and power analysis?
2. does it exclude notions of difference?

To concern ourselves with culture without politics is privilege of the rich.

Participation in relation to others is the basis for solidarity - where community does not demand sameness but foster care and responsibility across difference.

### **Chapter 3 Liberal Illness, Communal Remedies**

... at p55 a sub-heading -

#### **Quest for the Beloved Community**

Early twentieth century liberal Protestantism (Christianity as set of beliefs) held sway within Church and between Church and culture. Then Niebuhr said society is in perpetual state of war! For Ernst Troeltsch religion was essential for maintenance of social order, but surely religion should not just succumb to modern world view in order to gain adherents but create a new dogmatics. Richard Niebuhr took that on. Reinhold Niebuhr, aware of original sin, felt that personal apolitical morality was possible independent of collective immoral politics. When the individual operates in society the moral is hard-pressed by self-interest and illogical forces in nature and history. The Church therefore must be the central normative community, but society was against such a possibility and so all three theologians were disorientated.

#### **Richard Neuhaus: Resanctified Clothes for a Denuded Public.**

A disillusioned radical liberal of the 60s. Instead of being politically involved, Churches must work to debunk the inflated importance of politics. Because religion has been lost by USA, the society has no moral centre and is reduced to a warring arena. (The day of the Niebuhrs is over) Religion is the morality-bearing heart of a culture. State needs a transcendent other to be safe. Church should be cultural as opposed to economics and politics. There follows an unrealistic and moral view of Church.

#### **Stanley Hauerwas: "Let the Church be the Church"**

Says that Liberalism has not appreciated the importance of community on identity, and it therefore was never able to make coherent sense about our lives and moral bases.

Community, he sees as common history which makes people act together.

USA has no truthful narrative - it is full of violence and Xnity must offer Xt as Telos, not the nation state (even USA) as telos. Liberates gospel from liberalism and so is anti-feminist and dismisses equality as the politics of envy. Church shows to the world what it means to be a community of grace, quite distinct from any normal politics. We must tell the Xn story as a simple homogeneous absolutism. The Church is separate from our histories and commits sin only insofar as it participates in the world.

### **Larry Rasmussen: At home among the Fragments**

Hardly any moral fragments left because of modernity, and few skills to pursue the common good, says Rasmussen. Main problem is the market and secondly the state. When capitalism became a culture and not just an economic means it destroyed communities of civil society and left a bureaucratised society. The market numbs our sense of personal and social responsibility. Evaluates traditions and communities in light of their treatment of the 'other'. The Church is not the only or prime moral institution. Church can be revitalised and chastened into becoming egalitarian, pioneeringly creative, a haven and moral critic. To do this it must contain disparate voices. Fragments of love shared amidst struggle.

### **Conclusions from final chapter**

Choice may not be as MLK said, 'Chaos or Community' but "exclusion or connection". Between simplicity at cost of avoidance or relations painfully shaped out of our complex social world.

We must avoid unwarranted division between economy, culture and politics.

### **Monolithic Culture**

Difference is often seen as benign variation rather than as fuel for conflict or disruption. But marginalised communities will challenge this moral harmony. It is a desire for social wholeness and control. Any democratic polity will require recognition of difference and participation.

### **Jose Casanova**

Religious institutions enter the public sphere to

1. defend lifeworld against bureaucratic and market rationality.
  2. question states and markets
  3. bring what is called private into public sphere
- and thus foster rich participatory morality.

The Praxis of Mutuality.