

# Is Theocracy inescapable? Presuppositionalism, the public domain and post-secular theory

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## Abstrak

*In reaksie op die oorweldigende kritiek teen modernistiese narratiewe van sekularisasie, is die post-sekulêre draai gekenmerk deur 'n kritiese herevaluering van die rol van godsdiens in hedendaagse samelewings. In navolging van Jürgen Habermas, het post-sekulêre teoretici grotendeels daarin geslaag om die teenstelling tussen die godsdienstige en die sekulêre te dekonstrueer as dit kom by sosio-politieke deelname in die openbare lewe. Nietemin word post-sekulêre begrippe in hierdie verband steeds as onvoldoende beskou. Om hierdie rede bestaan daar steeds hewige debatte en selfs onsekerhede nie alleen aangaande die presiese betekenis van die post-sekulêre nie, maar ook spesifiek wat betref die waarde daarvan vir die verstaan van die rol van godsdiens in die samelewing. Een van die tekortkominge van die post-sekulêre teorie wat onlangs in die bestaande literatuur beklemtoon is, is die noodsaak van 'n kritiese herevaluering van die normatiewe voorveronderstellings wat vorm en rigting aan die openbare lewe gee. In die lig hiervan stel hierdie artikel Voorveronderstellende oftewel Aprioristiese Filosofie—soos geartikuleer deur filosowe soos Herman Dooyeweerd en Gordon Clark—voor as 'n skool wat tot nou toe verkeerdelik oorgesien is in gesprekke aangaande die post-sekulêre, maar wat 'n konstruktiewe raamwerk vir die verstaan van hierdie begrip kan verskaf. Dit word gedoen by wyse van die beklemtoning van hierdie skool se potensiaal vir die verstaan van die rol van normatiwiteit in die openbare lewe. Deur*

*daarop te wys dat die openbare lewe onlosmaaklik verbind is aan 'n bepaalde gehegtheid aan voorveronderstellings van 'n godsdienstige aard, stel hierdie raamwerk ons op 'n unieke wyse in staat om nie net die verouderde teenstelling tussen die godsdienstige en die sekulêre te oorbrug nie, maar ook om die rol van normatiewe voorveronderstellings in die openbare lewe te belig.*

## **Abstract**

*In reaction to the crisis of modernity's narratives of secularization, the post-secular turn has been characterized by a critical re-evaluation of the place of religion in contemporary societies. Following Jürgen Habermas, theorists of the post-secular have successfully challenged dichotomies between the religious and the secular when it comes to understanding the nature of socio-political engagement in the public domain. However, conceptualizations of the post-secular are still widely considered to be unsatisfactory, with continuing disputes and doubts regarding not only its exact meaning, but also its very utility for understanding religion and its role in society. One of the shortcomings of post-secular theory recently identified in the existing literature is its need for a critical re-evaluation of the role of normative presuppositions in shaping the public domain. In light thereof this article proposes Presuppositionalism—an often neglected philosophical school represented by philosophers such as Herman Dooyeweerd and Gordon Clark—as an unexplored, but constructive framework for post-secular theory, by emphasising its hereunto neglected potential as a framework for understanding the role of religion in the construction and re-construction of human society, as well as for understanding the function of normativity in the public domain. This underappreciated philosophical school's proposition that public life is inescapably shaped by presuppositions of a religious nature, is shown to have great value as a framework for overcoming outdated dichotomies between the religious and the secular, as well as in terms of elucidating, shaping and directing post-secular notions of presuppositional normativity in public life.*

**Keywords:**

**Clark, Gordon; Dooyeweerd, Herman; Post-secular; Presuppositionalism; Public Domain; Rushdoony, Rousas John; Secularization.**

## 1. Introduction

Challenges to the prevailing concept of secularization as it manifested itself in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, i.e., the theory that society becomes increasingly irreligious as it becomes increasingly scientifically, technologically, and industrially advanced, is nothing new, nor in itself groundbreaking. Comtean positivism, which provided much of the framework for these outdated theories of secularization such as Émile Durkheim's dichotomous differentiation between the "sacred" and the "profane", wherein world history manifests a supposed progress from primitive societies established on myths or religious prejudice to cultivated societies based on science, has fallen into wide disrepute since at least the 1960s (Gorski & Altinurdo, 2008:56; Casanova, 2019:5).

Notwithstanding more recent revivals of the idea in the late twentieth century, for example in the work of the American political theorist Francis Fukuyama, who advocated a philosophy of history characterized by an evolutionary process geared towards a teleological fulfilment in the liberal and secular democracy (Fukuyama, 1992:48, 345), this framework of understanding religion in the public domain has been widely discarded among contemporary scholars (Carr, 2021:7).

Following the "post-secular turn", a response to this crisis in modernity's grand narratives of secularization, scholars have strove to rethink the place of religion in modern societies which have revealed themselves to be only "seemingly secularized" (Beilik-Robson, 2019:58) and wherein religion continues to play not only an identifiable but a significant role in the public domain as a socio-cultural phenomenon (Kaltsas, 2019:460). The German sociologist Jürgen Habermas (1929-), credited with coining the term "post-secular", argued for a re-conceptualization of the public domain on the basis that secular theories had not fully taken into account the continuing role of religious traditions in terms of the legitimization and continuing existence of modern constitutional democracies, and that the idea of a secular exclusion of religion from the public sphere has no correlation with reality, the recognition of which itself necessitates a critical re-evaluation of the role of religion in the public domain (Habermas, 2008:27-28). Leading contemporary sociologists

of religion, such as José Casanova (1951-), for example, a senior fellow with the Berkeley Centre for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University, prefers to rather cast the post-Enlightenment phenomenon commonly referred to in the past as “secularization” as a dynamic of de-confessionalization, a form of liberation from traditional religious structures, rather than the mere rise of irreligiosity (Casanova, 2019:24-25). Moreover, Casanova admits that even this process of de-confessionalization is by no means universal and can be a largely Western European experience (Ibid., 25, 32). He therefore postulates that “global humanity is becoming simultaneously more religious and more secular” (Ibid., 65). The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1931-) accordingly argues that modernity has not seen the disappearance of religion from the public domain, as the secularization thesis postulated, but rather witnessed its diversification into a plurality of cultural and moral sources. For Taylor (2011:37, 50-51), the public domain is pluralized as opposed to secularized.

In light of such successful critiques of the outdated dichotomy between the religious and the secular, it has become commonplace for many contemporary sociologists of religion to speak of a “post-secular complexity”, characterized by a conceptual blurring of the boundaries between the secular and religious, between the moral and the legal and between the private and the public, by which the purely instrumental or utilitarian understanding of politics which characterized the secularization thesis is succeeded by a renewed appreciation for the moral aspects shaping public life (Momberg, Granholm & Nyäs, 2012:1-2; Kaltsas, 2019:460). Yet, despite the well-established prevalence and success of the criticisms of secularization theory, conceptualizations of the post-secular are still widely considered to be unsatisfactory, with continuing disputes and doubts regarding not only its exact meaning, but also its very utility for understanding religion and its role in society (Parmaksiz, 2016:98-99). The post-secular understanding of the place of religion in society, despite its theoretical innovation, is therefore still in many regards marked by disarray (Momberg & Granholm, 2012:95). One of the aspects recently identified by the University of Athens philosopher Spiyidon Kaltsas as an area where more work is required with regard to the development of a functional and more coherent post-secular theory, pertains to “the normative presuppositions of the public sphere” (Kaltsas, 2019:460). This need itself must be understood in terms of the general recognition that the post-secular turn is largely the result of postmodernity’s epistemological doubt regarding the autonomy and self-sufficiency of reason which had underpinned modernist narratives of secularization as a process of systematic societal emancipation from religion (Prosman, 2011:3-4).

In light of the scholarly recognition of the need for a re-conceptualization of religion and its place in society and the public domain, and in particular the expressed need to investigate the role of normative presuppositions in terms of shaping the public domain, this article aims to propose *Presuppositionalism* as an unexplored, but constructive framework for post-secular conceptualization, by emphasizing its hereunto neglected potential as a theoretical system for understanding the role of religion in the construction (and re-construction) of human society and human participation in the public domain in particular. By investigating the presuppositional understanding of religiosity, its potential as a framework for post-secular theory will be explored, particularly in terms of its potential to contribute not only to satisfying the need for re-conceptualizing not only the social and cultural place of religion in society, but also the need for an improved understanding of the relationship between religion and the public domain itself.

The focus of the article will firstly be on explaining the basic tenets of Presuppositionalism itself, thereafter, focusing on its implications for religion and society and finally emphasizing its value as a theoretical framework for a post-secular understanding of the dynamics of religion in the public domain.

## **2. Presuppositionalism as theological and philosophical system**

Philosophically speaking, Presuppositionalism can best be described as a system based around the conviction that no sensible human experience or thought is possible apart from a framework shaped by epistemic presuppositions, which function as the ultimate criterion for truth (Ahivo, 2005:31). Forms of Presuppositionalism were famously advocated as a distinctly Christian philosophy in the twentieth century by the Dutch Neo-Calvinist philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) and the American philosopher-theologian Gordon Clark (1902-1985) (Coletto, 2011:101; Boa & Bowman, 2012:256).<sup>1</sup>

Dooyeweerd argued that presuppositions or pre-theoretical axioms underpin all human thought and that these presuppositions, by virtue of their epistemological nature and as spiritual driving forces impelling any thinker to interpret reality through its lenses, have a distinctly religious significance

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1 Notwithstanding the differences between Clark and Dooyeweerd regarding the Dooyeweerdian distinction between cosmic time and historical time (Nash, 1962:86), both can be considered as promoting forms of Philosophical Presuppositionalism (Sell, 1988:238).

(Dooyeweerd, 1935:vi-vii). This is because, as Dooyeweerd argues, the presuppositional nature of human thought or experience pertains to the innate human impulse to direct itself towards the absolute origin, source, and cause of all meaning, and as such presuppositions are pre-theoretical and non-demonstrable commitments taken in faith (Ibid., 21, 24). For Dooyeweerd, all human knowledge is dependent upon the acceptance of such pre-theoretical intuitions and non-demonstrable commitments of faith as the necessary framework enabling theoretical thinking. As the Free University of Amsterdam professors of Philosophy Gerrit Glas and Jeroen de Ridder (2017:19) point out, Dooyeweerd's

most important target was the absolutization of theoretical thought ... [i.e.] the presumed autonomy of theoretical reasoning, he thought, that lay at the heart of the crisis in the philosophy and culture of his days.

Clark likewise argued that a blank mind, void of presuppositions, is no mind at all, and that non-demonstrable axioms are necessary for the acquisition of any sensible and meaningful knowledge and experience (Clark, 1946:41). For Clark (1993:60), the central divide between his own Christian worldview and all non-Christian worldviews, was the incompatibility of distinct axioms which shaped contrasting epistemologies. Clark maintained that the recognition of the inescapability of presuppositional frameworks have significant moral and political implications for when it comes to achieving equity and good governance in service of the public good (Clark, 1977:183-184), but his emphasis on philosophical Presuppositionalism was always primarily directed as a means of establishing a framework for Christian apologetics, that is, the defence of the beliefs of Christianity as truthful. Indeed, the same can be said about the man often credited with being the father of Presuppositionalism, Clark's slightly older contemporary, the Dutch-American philosopher and theologian Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987), who argued that God and his revelation, as opposed to man himself, ought to be "the ultimate reference point in human predication" (Van Til, 1967:180). For Van Til, a central implication of this axiom, and in particular his understanding that the epistemic acceptance or rejection thereof lies at the heart of the difference between accepting or rejecting the Christian worldview, is that there could be no neutrality and no alternative to either accepting or rejecting the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all areas of life (Ibid., 242-243).

The main criticism levelled against the philosophical Presuppositionalism underlying the apologetics of the likes of Van Til and Clark is that it fails to convincingly argue for the objective falsehood of non-Christian worldviews

vis-à-vis the Christian worldview as objectively true (Haines, 2017:54), but such criticisms are problematic not only in light of broad contemporary scholarly recognition of the problems inherent to the epistemic notion of “objective truth” (Osbeck, 2020:43), but because such criticisms fail to appreciate how central the denial of the existence of such epistemic objectivity is to Presuppositionalism itself. In fact, the Presuppositional philosophical frameworks not only of Clark and Van Til, but also of Dooyeweerd himself is marked by a distinct aversion to any notions of epistemic objectivity (Coletto, 2007:597). Furthermore, and of vital importance to the argument in this article, even such outdated epistemic criticisms of Presuppositionalism in no way negates its value as framework for understanding the role of normativity in the public domain, as I will proceed to show.

It was Van Til’s successor and most renowned student, the American Presbyterian philosopher Rousas John Rushdoony (1916-2001), who sought to apply Van Tillian Presuppositionalism beyond the confines of epistemology and apologetics to the public domain, by arguing for biblical and moral civics as normative moral framework for all societies based on the conviction of Jesus Christ’s Lordship (Ingersoll, 2015:14-15). Like Van Til, Clark and Dooyeweerd, Rushdoony maintained that the idea that religious neutrality is an illusion, applying this to all aspects of human life, arguing that in all human society, there is “no neutral ground, nor any neutral area of thought and activity” (Rushdoony, 1987:184). His conviction was based on the premise that all human thought and activity are inescapably shaped by a distinct epistemologically sanctioned worldview, since “man cannot transcend himself to view the human situation with godlike objectivity”, and consequently condemned the “doctrine of neutralism” as an “Enlightenment faith in the objectivity of reason” (Rushdoony, 1965:77). Consequently, for Rushdoony (1975:11), in all societies,

the source of law is the sovereign ... Law is inseparable from sovereignty, and the god of any system can be quickly identified by locating the source of law ... Humanistic law has as its logical sovereign every man as his own god, and therefore his own law. The result is anarchy.

Such a presuppositionalist understanding of social reality and the legal frameworks that shape that reality, has radical implications for the conceptualization of religion and the public domain, as this article will continue to show.

### 3. Presuppositionalism and the public domain

Rushdoony's twentieth-century presuppositionalist proposition of a distinct moral framework as necessary standard and framework for functional governance and as a bastion against total anarchy was, in itself, nothing new at the time. The great Athenian philosopher Plato argued that, for the sake of governing everyone in the republic by the same standard, reason ("nous") was to function as standard, and that all civic legislation should reflect a love of reason: equality before the law, for Plato, necessitates having one law, which in turn necessitates having a single moral framework for the sake of consistent and just legislation (Plato 375 B.C.:590d). Aristotle (340 B.C.:5:VII) likewise considered true justice in the civil realm to be based upon what has come to be known as the golden rule principle, i.e., treating others like you want to be treated, as inferred from natural law, which he considered to be universally applicable.

Pre-modern or medieval Europe, as the manifestation of the idea of *corpus Christianum*, was also theoretically sanctioned by the idea that political rulers understand the teachings of the Christian Church as derived from divine revelation to be the moral standard upon which to base their policies. This is clear in, for example, the classic medieval idea embodied by Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) that correspondence to divine revelation is a prerequisite for just civic legislation (Aquinas, 1485:q. 91, a. 1). This is not to say that pre-Enlightenment societies neglected the role of reason, custom or culture in terms of legislation, but merely that they explicitly recognized the existence of an objective moral framework as standard or measure of justice (Grewe, 2000:142).

Of course, the existing social order would be radically challenged by the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, with its socio-political theory generating what the University of North Texas sociologist, Milan Zafirovsky (2010:93-94) describes as "a profound discontinuity, even direct or indirect revolutionary break, from Christian theocracy and civilization". Thomas Paine (1737-1809), the American Enlightenment philosopher, for example, acknowledged that the Enlightenment-based revolution in the system of government as it manifested in France and would later manifest all over the Western world, was intrinsically connected to "a revolution in the system of religion", arguing that any connection between religion and politics is an "adulterous" one, and adding that the political implications of Enlightenment epistemics are intrinsically dependent upon a complete revolution in the system of religion (Paine, 1896:22).

The nineteenth-century British historian, Sir Henry James Sumner Maine (1822-1888), used this same Enlightenment notion of political liberation from religion to propose a historical narrative in which pre-modern societies supposedly functioned within the legal framework of the “rule of religion” as opposed to the “rule of law” (Maine, 1861:22).

However, this dichotomy would be challenged, perhaps most notably, by the influential Neo-Calvinist theologian, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), who argued that “man is never autonomous, but always and everywhere bound to laws not conceived of by himself, but prescribed unto him by God as rule for his life”, and that therefore any notions of autonomy amount to self-deception because of the inescapability of a moral framework for human existence, arguing for “theonomy” as the only alternative to false notions of autonomy and the only moral framework that does not descend into chaos and anarchy, and that “gives unto any creature its rightful place and its true meaning” (Bavinck, 1913:101-102).<sup>2</sup>

The word theonomy, derived from the Greek words “theos” (God) and “nomos” (Law), entails the idea that Divine revelation alone is the authoritative standard for every aspect of life (Ingersoll, 2015:15). It forms the basis of Bavinck’s argument against the idea of the liberation from divine authority and was essentially rooted in an ontological conception of human existence as fundamentally dependent, as opposed to independent being. Within the Neo-Calvinist philosophical framework in which Bavinck operated, only two types of existence or being are recognized: independent being and dependent being. Independent being can only be attributed to God while all other realities are wholly dependent upon Him. Therefore, since there can be, logically speaking, nothing superseding the theistic, with all non-theistic or created realities being necessarily dependent upon that self-existing and self-causing theistic reality, any notions of true liberty for dependent beings must necessarily be founded upon that sole self-caused and self-existing Being: The Triune God (Bavinck, 1897:309).

Such a view necessarily has consequences for the understanding of human liberty and authority, since neither reason nor will, in being dependent and caused realities, can ever be regarded as basis for true liberty or authority as it had been conceived of by Enlightenment scholars (Rousseau, 1762:69), as no created being ever exists in an uncreated or unordained vacuum.

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2 “de mensch niet autonoom, maar altijd en overal gebonden aan wetten, die niet door hem zijn uitgedacht, maar door God hem ten regel van zijn leven zijn voorgeschreven,” “teonomie,” “welke aan alle schepsel zijne rechte plaats verleent en zijne ware beteekenis schenkt.”

It was through noticing Bavinck's dichotomy between theonomy and autonomy, that Cornelius van Til (1967:180) sanctioned his presuppositional recognition or non-recognition of a self-causing and all-causing theistic reality as basic to all human thought. Rushdoony, in turn, was quite explicit about the decisive role of Presuppositionalism in shaping his political and legal philosophy:

Autonomy, literally self-law, is man's attempt to supplant God's law with his own, which, however much in many versions makes claims to being godly and moral, separates itself from the God of Scripture. Man becomes the determiner of "law", which is more opinion than law. Theonomy, which means God's Law, takes law, and ultimate rule, out of the hands of man because it belongs to God. There can be no understanding of Christian Reconstructionism apart from ... presuppositional thinking. Given [its] rejection of natural law as an aspect of autonomy, the Christian community must look to God's law or become lawless. Theonomy is inseparable from Christianity (Rushdoony, 2017:529-530).

For Rushdoony, the notions of obedience and authority is inherent to any human society, but any notion of authority, he contends, is fundamentally a religious matter, since the ultimate authority in any society functions as the lawgiver of that society, and such a lawgiver demands obedience. Presuppositionally speaking, Rushdoony then argues, theocracy is inescapable in the public domain, since the lawgiver in any society, by virtue of this demand for obedience, is the *de facto theos* of that society (Rushdoony, 1973:215). Explaining this presuppositional proposition with a well-known Biblical example, Rushdoony notes that

Adam and Eve were no less religious in their disobedience than in their obedience. When they assumed that man is autonomous and has a freedom of choice with respect to God's law, and the freedom to determine what shall be law, they made a moral and religious decision, and they acted in obedience to their new religious presuppositions (Ibid., 216).

Within the presuppositionalist framework, then, religiosity is itself inescapable, firstly for the individual, because presuppositions, understood to be inherently religious in nature, are inescapable, and secondly for society, because of it being ontologically structured around the dynamic of authority and obedience, which necessarily entails the "religious nature of law" from which it follows that "in any culture the source of law is the god of that society" (Rushdoony, 1973:4).

It is this second implication of the presuppositionalist understanding of religiosity in particular that pertains to discussions on the public domain, since when scholars speak of the role of religion in the public domain or in society,

they do not necessarily seek to address and account for the innumerable personal “religious”—or “irreligious”—convictions of all individuals that make up that given society, which would of course be an impossible task regardless of the geographic, social or historical context of that society. Religion in the public domain rather refers the role of religion as phenomenon and force in the public life of any given society and to how religion shapes and impacts human participation in that public life. The public domain therefore pertains to those actions which are conducted through the engagement of the individual and family in society within the established legal framework of that society (Vandermeersch, 2013:88).

The presuppositionalist contention, therefore, is that this very legal framework, regardless of how it is structured, is itself religiously sanctioned by virtue of its claim to authority and demand for obedience. For the presuppositionalist, religion is no more established in a Christian theonomy, i.e., a society where legislation is based on the principles of Biblical law, than it is in what is commonly referred to as secular democracies. Rushdoony, for example, dismisses secularism as “the religious practice of humanism”, with profound legal implications: “Our conflicts in the courts and the world at large are with secular humanism. It is the religious force present in newspapers, television, the world of labour and capital, the arts and sciences, and elsewhere as well” (Rushdoony, 2019:1208).

It is precisely this presuppositionalist contention, namely of the inescapably religious and essentially theocratic nature inherent to human society, that I believe can fruitfully contribute to contemporary discussions of the post-secular and of religion in the context of the public domain.

#### **4. The utility and value of Presuppositionalism for a post-secular conceptualization of religion in the public domain**

The contention that authority in the public domain is inherently religious is fundamentally based on certain theological premises. In the biblical account of the trial of Jesus, He famously said to Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judaea at the time, that he would have no public authority had it not been given to him by God (John 19:11). At the heart of such a conception of authority, of course, lies a philosophical distinction between theistic reality as sole independent or autonomous being while attributing dependent existence all non-theistic realities.

This presuppositionalist conceptualization of authority could, of course, be challenged by all who do not embrace the theistic worldview of its proponents. However, even those who reject the philosophy of Presuppositionalism should recognize that it does successfully point out what even leading atheistic theorists of the post-secular now admit, namely that civic legislation itself necessarily requires a lawgiver whose legislative authority is publicly recognized and respected (Habermas, 2017:25; Sinnott-Armstrong, 2009:100). Furthermore, even the influential contemporary post-structuralist political philosopher Saul Newman (2021:186) has recently pointed to the inescapability of theological presuppositions for participation in the public domain by noting that:

the contemporary political terrain is being pluralised, not only by different religions with their claim to the public space but also by new secular social movements and ecological sensibilities that have an unmistakably theological character ... [which] necessitate ... expanding the definition of religion to the 'non-religious.'

Post-secular scholars are increasingly recognizing that authority is necessarily, as Rushdoony points out, fundamentally a religious matter. While it can be countered that in non-theistic frameworks authority can be conceptualized in non-religious terms, such a counterargument fails to convincingly counter the notion that, in the public domain, notions of authority perceived to be both religious and non-religious functionally operate in the same way and serve the same practical purposes. One might reject the presuppositionalist idea of equating a society's ultimate lawgiver with the God of that society, but this does not negate the fact that whichever lawgiver any alternative view proposes, essentially serves the same function as God does in the Christian theonomic view, in terms of normatively and legally ordering and structuring the public domain. Therefore, Presuppositionalism shows us that what is normally called "theocracy" as a description of a theologically-sanctioned political order, is not functionally different from the any non-theistic or non-theological political order in terms of the modus by which it is epistemically sanctioned and ontologically structured.

In this regard therefore, the Presuppositionalist notion of theocracy as inescapable can be most useful in terms of enriching the post-secular understanding of the role of religion in the public domain, especially in terms of clarifying what theorists of the post-secular have termed the "blurring of the boundaries between the secular and religious" (Momberg, Granholm & Nyäs, 2012:2) as well as contributing to the development of new frameworks in contemporary discussions on religion in public life, which are still characterized by "competing understandings of key terms such

as religion, secularism, secularization and the post-secular” (May, Wilson, Baumgart-Ochse & Skeikh, 2014:331). This is especially true in terms of its functionality as a framework for understanding the normative presuppositions that structure and enable public life, which Presuppositionalism identifies as inescapably religious in nature, thereby providing a coherent challenge to the very secular-religious and concurrent public-private divide or dichotomy which post-secular theory strives to overcome.

Furthermore, it successfully challenges what is now widely recognized as unsatisfactory notions of secularity which often simplistically equates it with a non-theistic worldview (Domingo, 2016:12), by virtue of pointing out that both “religious” theists and “non-religious” non-theists functionally operate on similar kinds of epistemic premises and frameworks when it comes to authority, legislation and practice in the public domain.

Finally, Presuppositionalism provides a valuable contribution to and elucidation of the post-secular theory of the nature of human participation in the public domain which, in contradistinction to, for example post-structuralist notions of society as the manifestation of power-relationships, emphasise the unavoidability of normative presuppositions in terms of enabling public participation and discourse (Thomassen, 2008:17-18).

## **5. Conclusion**

One of the recognized shortcomings of post-secular theory unto now has been the lack of a clear understanding of the place and role of normative presuppositions in the public domain (Kaltsas, 2019:460). By virtue of its emphasis on the role of epistemic and pre-theoretical commitments in making human experience, thought and interaction possible, Presuppositionalism provides a constructive and useful theoretical framework for the conceptualization of the function of such presuppositions in terms of normatively structuring and shaping the public domain as well as human participation in it. Its proposition that all societies are inescapably religious and all socio-political orders inescapably theocratic in nature, is, particularly in terms of its central notion that civic legislation itself necessarily requires a lawgiver whose legislative authority is publicly recognized and respected, already implicitly recognized by even leading atheist theorists of the post-secular. Thus, while non-Christian and non-Presuppositional philosophical positions might take exception at this proposition of theocracy as inescapable, such a contention would, in the context of contemporary discussions of the post-secular, amount to nothing more than a mere semantic dispute. This

is because, on an epistemic level, Presuppositionalism convincingly shows that all moral frameworks—frameworks rooted in those presuppositions ineluctable for the functionality of the public domain—whether that be theistic or non-theistic, operate in the same way in terms of identifying the source of both truth and meaning.

Presuppositionalism's value for post-secular theory is particularly clear in its utility for overcoming the religious-secular dichotomy. Furthermore, it successfully challenges outdated and oversimplistic narratives of secularity based upon a false dichotomy of the religious as theistic and the secular as anti-theistic or of secularization as a process of emancipation from theism, by pointing out that, in the establishment of the public policy, there is always a normative framework at work which functionally operates in the same way with regard to its epistemic sanction, regardless of the worldview or moral standard which underpins it. Presuppositionalism also convincingly shows that the legal ratification of religious liberty does not in itself preclude the public establishment and government enforcement of that which, if not in theory, then at least in practice amounts to religious norms as legal framework for the public domain. This in itself opens up possibilities for the further investigation of the ways in which even modern liberal democratic states have enshrined values which functionally amount to established religious presuppositions which shape their public life, and in that sense, are essentially theocratic in nature.

While this article does not aim to propose that the presuppositionalist philosophical framework should have the final say in terms of shaping and directing post-secular notions of normativity and religion in the public domain, what has been argued here is that it does serve as a most valuable and constructive contribution in terms of providing coherence and integrity to such notions in the midst of the continuing quest for satisfactory post-secular theories of the (inter)relationship between religion and society.

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