

## **The Postsecular and Political Belonging: Transcendent communities as Insurrectional Politics**

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*“But let justice run down like waters and righteousness as a mighty and ever-flowing stream” Amos 5:24*

This verse from Amos was a favourite of Martin Luther King Jr. Indeed, scholars of King have suggested that Amos was King’s favourite of the Old Testament prophets. The entire book of Amos declares the judgement of an angry God against the established law and institutions of Israel, which are depicted as base, corrupt, immoral and unjust. Amos is highly critical of the wealthy leaders and rulers of his day, who neglect the poor. As such, “he is a permanent goad to those in power” (Barton 2012: 179). It is little wonder then that his writings have been an important source for many “insurrectional political movements” including liberation theology in Latin America and Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement in the United States.

I want to suggest that King and his followers were enacting a form of religious insurrectional politics and that by including King and the civil rights movement under the rubric of “insurrectional politics”, we are also able to see how religion is itself a form of insurrection, while at the same time being a part of broader insurrectional movements. It may even be possible to argue that certain aspects of religion are always insurrectional, for manifestations of religion can challenge deeply held beliefs about the nature of the world and of reality. On a broader level, it challenges purely temporal, immanent interpretations of reality, suggesting that there is something “out there”, something that goes beyond what we can see, feel, experience and know, something that is transcendent and eternal.

In this paper, I want to explore the intersection of religion with insurrectional political movements in nominally secular, Western contexts. As such, I focus primarily on movements informed by Christian theology and involving Christian actors. I suspect, however, that the points I plan to make are not limited to Christian forms of insurrectional politics, but could be relevant to analyses of other forms of religious insurrectional politics too.

I will argue that Christian political movements fall within the classification of “insurrection” in a number of ways, across multiple scales. I wish to argue that religion is both immanently insurrectional and transcendently insurrectional and it operates in these ways at the broader societal level, within social movements and at the level of the individual (and no doubt many other levels, but these are the ones I will particularly focus on). Firstly, at least for movements undertaken in secular Western contexts, political movements that are religiously informed are immanently insurrectional because they challenge dominant secular modes of politics. They do not simply try to make religion “fit” with secular frameworks, though undoubtedly there is crossover with secular values. Instead, I suggest that movements that are self-consciously religious are endeavouring to promote an alternative framework of meaning, interpretation and consciousness. In this way, religious actors are reflecting (and perhaps, arguably, have always reflected), the commitment of postsecular theorists that “values such as democracy, freedom, equality, inclusion, and justice may not necessarily be best pursued within an exclusively immanent secular framework” (Mavelli and Petito 2012: 936). Such transcendental, eternal meaning frameworks present their own challenges, since they can in turn be quite specific, exclusionary and violent interpretations of justice, but the point remains that they challenge the dominance of the secular paradigm. In this view, ordinary everyday religious practices, such as prayer, fasting, the giving of alms and charity, can become highly significant acts of insurrection, both immanently and transcendently.

Secondly, I suggest that religiously informed political movements are insurrectional because they challenge established religious orders as well. In this

way they are also immanently insurrectional, within religious establishments, religious communities and for individuals. As well as challenging the secular monopoly over the pursuit of the common good, religious insurrectional politics challenge other religious authorities, interpretations, structures and practices concerning how religion should be thought of and practiced and what its place and role in society is. In both the examples I consider in this paper, this challenge to established religious sensitivities is clear.

Thirdly, I suggest that as well as being immanently insurrectional, religion is also transcendentally insurrectional. Religion confronts people's assumptions about the existence of an eternal transcendent reality and what this reality should look like, the principles by which it operates and the ways in which that transcendent reality can and should intersect with the immanent reality.

Finally, I suggest that wherever religion is present in a political movement, it will always be insurrectional in one way or another. This is not simply because it challenges established secular orders, but also because the presence of religion challenges individual beliefs and assumptions. Its presence in a campaign will always provoke reactions about the nature and impact of religion, whether religion can and should comment and contribute to public societal debates, whether there is a place for transcendental realities in the context of debates about the immanent, whether there is even any such thing as a transcendental, eternal reality and perhaps fundamentally about religion's relationship to power – whether it is an emancipatory force, an oppressive force or no force at all.

The paper begins by considering the postsecular turn as a form of insurrectional politics, drawing out insights from recent postsecular theorizing that facilitate a deeper, nuanced engagement with religion's public political role. Then the paper will consider the specifically insurrectional aspects of religion itself, what I mean by immanently and transcendentally insurrectional, before moving on to the discussion of the two examples – the civil rights movement in the US, particularly Martin Luther King, and the contemporary movement for the rights of failed

asylum seekers in the ongoing Dutch campaign “De Vluchtkerk” (literally “Refugee Church”), where religion forms part of a broader political movement around alternative conceptions of political belonging.

*Postsecularism as insurrectional politics*

Having finally come to terms with the fact that religion has not disappeared as expected but instead is re-emerging in public life, taking on new forms (Berger 1999; Casanova 1994; Hurd 2008; Wilson 2012), International Relations scholars are now exploring how to make sense of this seeming “return of religion” (Petito and Hatzopoulos 2003). The most recent injection in this debate is the concept of the postsecular.

The postsecular is still fluid, with multiple debates about its meaning and application (Mavelli and Petito 2012). Yet notions of “resistance” and “alternatives” feature prominently in efforts to define and describe this emerging phenomenon. Recent publications in International Relations have noted that the postsecular offers “a form of radical theorising and critique” that acknowledges the positive and constructive contribution religion can play in the pursuit of equality, justice and emancipation in contemporary society (Habermas 2006; Mavelli and Petito 2012: 936). The postsecular challenges the dominance of secularism, particularly assertive forms of secularism (Kuru 2007) that police the borders of the public sphere and limit expressions of religious argumentation and belief from entering therein. Contrary to the assumptions of such assertive secularisms, which argue that religion is irrational and causes only violence and chaos when permitted in the public sphere, the postsecular argues that religion can also be an important source of meaning and identity, one that can open up alternative ways of being in and responding to the world, that can positively contribute to the pursuit of justice and emancipation for humanity (Barbato 2010 & 2012; Habermas 2006; Cloke and Beaumont 2012; Mavelli and Petito 2012).

As a part of the shift to the postsecular then, not only does engaging with religion or having a belief system become one option amongst many, as Charles Taylor (2007: 3) has suggested, but religion becomes a legitimate option, amongst many others, for challenging dominant paradigms and political ideologies. Further, Taylor (2007:13) claims “[T]he presumption of unbelief has become dominant in more and more... milieux; and has achieved hegemony in certain crucial ones, in the academic and intellectual life, for instance; whence it can more easily extend itself to others” (Taylor 2007: 13); that the characteristic of a secular age is where non-belief becomes the default option and faith becomes simply one option amongst many. In a postsecular age, if that is indeed what we are entering, non-belief is no longer the default position and is itself considered one option amongst many others. This is not to say that belief becomes the default position again. Rather, the default position becomes one where belief and non-belief co-exist, or where, in fact, there is no default position. Particularly in Western contexts, where religion was once “out of fashion”, and prior to that, as Simone Chambers (2007) has reminded us, philosophy was out of fashion, now both are fashionable. Religion is gaining ground as a form of political activism and as a means for challenging the power and legitimacy of the state (and indeed other dominant forms of power in contemporary global politics, such as transnational corporations), but this does not necessarily come at the expense of the secular. Rather religious and secular actors and discourses are finding new ways of working together in order to challenge dominant paradigms. Here I am drawing on the relational dialogist framework that I have previously developed (Wilson 2010; 2012) – rather than viewing the relationship between secularism and religion as an “either/or”, contemporary political activism encourages us, perhaps even requires us, to view this relationship as a “both-and” – both religious and secular – and many other things besides. Such religious/secular partnerships are not without their problems and tensions, as we shall see, but the seeming increase in the overt presence of religion in the public sphere in secular societies does suggest there is some kind of shift occurring.

Previously, secular political ideologies and logic presented the only legitimate source of political power and the only means by which the power of

the state could be effectively challenged. By this I mean that secular political ideologies have occupied the mainstream, while various other political ideologies, including religious, have occupied the fringe, not able to make or be used for a serious challenge of state policy and power. In a postsecular society, as well as religion becoming one option amongst many others, equally the secular is one option amongst multiple others. Thus, challenging the secular power of the state (or multinational corporations and IFIs) is not the sole purview of other secular political ideologies. Neither is the challenge by religious political ideologies to secular state power limited to non-Western “developing” states, as Mark Juergensmeyer suggested in the early 1990s (Juergensmeyer 1993). Religion is increasingly being used as a source of political inspiration and challenge in Western state contexts, one example of which I explore in this paper, the case of De Vluchtkerk.

Jurgen Habermas has made a compelling argument for the inclusion of religious arguments in public political debates. He gives the example of pro-life campaigners translating their position into scientific and secular terms, arguing that in doing so their argument has lost meaning. Rather than viewing the exclusion of religious language as a triumph for secularism, Habermas argues that such a move on the part of religious campaigners is to some extent undemocratic and in fact a loss, for religious and secular alike. “The exclusion of religious argument from the public sphere is not only unfair; it can ‘sever secular society from important resources of meaning’” (Habermas 2006: 10). There is a certain beauty and essence in religious language and justifications for particular moral positions, that are often useful in conveying meaning and truth, beauty and essence that are lost if speakers rely solely on scientific rational language. The language of science does not speak to everyone. While people may not believe the central premise of religious faith, they may respond to the aesthetics of the religious language in a sense. In the case of pro-life campaigners, the argument that human beings are sacred because they are made in the image of God may have more resonance for some non-believers than the scientific argument, because of the beauty and inspiration that lies within such a sentiment. The idea that there is something sacred about each individual life, regardless of where you believe that sacredness comes from or how it is defined,

can in many ways be more convincing for some people than a rational scientific argument, even for people who are not themselves religious, but who are perhaps more artistically than scientifically inclined. Religious organisations, particularly those that openly employ religious imagery, stories, sentiments, values and beliefs in generating alternative visions for how politics and society can operate, are endeavouring to bring something of this beauty, meaning and essence that religion can contribute to public debates and to promote a shift to an other-centred consciousness. Such an insight also highlights the power that language, symbolism, narrative and aesthetics can carry in political debate.

By arguing that the inclusion of religious language in public debate is not only necessary but desirable, Habermas calls into question particular assumptions about what is acceptable and what is not in political debate, specifically assumptions concerning the nature of public debate, its basis in rationalism and even fundamentally what is considered rational and what is considered irrational. Scholars in the areas of emotion and aesthetics have contributed to challenging such established notions of “common sense”. Bleiker (2009: 29) claims “the aesthetic model of thought challenges the construction of common sense that has given social science, and instrumental reason in general, the power to synchronise the senses and claim the high ground in the interpretation of world politics”. Religious models of thought operate in much the same way. By arguing for the contribution that religious arguments can make to public debate, Habermas (2006), Bretherton (2010) and others promote a “shift in sensibilities” (Bleiker 2009: 29) away from the dualistic patterns of thought implicit in the secularist bias in International Relations.

While endeavouring to push us beyond secularist boundaries of public reasoning, several recent critiques have pointed out that Habermas’ arguments remain embedded within secular Enlightenment structures that aim to maintain the divisions between secular and religious reasoning and to privilege scientific rationalism (Mavelli and Petito 2012: 936; Pabst 2012: 1003-4). His proposition holds that religious argumentation has an important contribution to make within civil society, but he draws the line at religious arguments being employed within the parliamentary sphere and in public law- and political decision-making. Considered in this light, his proposals are not so revolutionary and in fact do not

depart that much from the parameters laid out by John Rawls (1999). Indeed, Dallmayr (2012: 968) points out that the notion of secular public reasoning to which all people have access is a myth of the Enlightenment. Key secular thinkers like Rawls and Habermas themselves, have constantly required interpretation and translation, as have the judgments of the courts, to make them more accessible by a majority of people (Dallmayr 2012: 968).

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd (2012) has shown how this “secular postsecularism” (Pabst 2012) impacts on policy and International Relations theory. She argues that recent attempts to bring religion back into IR have generally been polarized around “good religion” and “bad religion”. She notes that this categorization still judges religion according to the terms of debate set by secularists – “good religions” are those that conform to and promote liberal secular norms and values, that do not undermine or destabilize established orders and structures, and serve to further the goals of the state. “Bad religions”, on the other hand, are those that undermine liberal secular order and values and challenge the authority of the (secular) state. Another way for describing these “bad religions”, I suggest, is as insurrectional politics, but these “bad religions” may not necessarily be incompatible with the pursuit of broader goals of justice, equality and emancipation. After all, Martin Luther King’s politics were classified as “bad religion” by some commentators of his day, both religious and secular. What political movements are we presently discrediting as “bad religion” that are in fact playing an important role in the pursuit of justice?

### *Immanent and Transcendent Insurrection*

One way to understand the frameworks and actions of religious insurrectional politics, I suggest, is as immanently insurrectional and transcendentally insurrectional, whether they are understood as “good religion” or “bad religion” by secular political frameworks. Immanent insurrection involves challenging structures in the here and now; using everyday actions to challenge both immanent and transcendent structures and worldviews. I understand immanent as that which is immediately visible, present and which impacts on people’s lived



experiences. Religions participate in immanent insurrection, but their participation is not always distinguishable from secular acts of immanent insurrection. They participate in immanent insurrection because they believe God is present in the immanent and can act in the immanent, but also that they are called by God to act (Erickson 1998: 337). “Even what are ordinarily considered natural events should be seen as God’s doing, for nature and God are not as separate as we usually think. God is present everywhere, not just in the spectacular or unusual occurrences. He is at work within human individuals and thus within human institutions and movements. Disjunctions are not to be sharply drawn between God and humans or God and the world.” (Erickson 1998: 330)

My understanding of immanent insurrection draws on the work of Asef Bayat and his concept of the Quiet Encroachment of the Ordinary (2000 and 2010). While Bayat’s focus is the urban disenfranchised in the Middle East and mine is the secular West, his concept of the Quiet Encroachment of the Ordinary is nonetheless appealing as a means for conceptualizing how actors endeavor to change their circumstances. It is particularly relevant to the examples I focus on in this paper, the civil rights movement and the rights of asylum seekers and stateless persons, since both these movements make claims on behalf of urban disenfranchised persons.

Bayat makes the distinction between ordinary acts undertaken specifically as a form of resistance, with the intention to break laws and defy authority, and those that are undertaken not by choice but by necessity, people break laws and defy authority because they must in order to ensure their survival. I would suggest that both form part of immanent insurrection, though for different reasons and constitute different types. I’m also not sure that I would draw such a sharp distinction. Arguably, deliberate resistance is as necessary for people’s survival as necessary resistance – people can only cope with oppression and marginalization for so long. Necessary resistance, for Bayat, is what constitutes the quiet encroachment of the ordinary. He classifies the tapping of municipal power poles in order to steal electricity to light a dwelling as quiet

encroachment, or the squeezing of time for a formal job in order to create more time for work in the informal sector to bring in additional income (Bayat 2000: 546). Quiet encroachment involves alternative notions of property ownership, civic order and urban governance to those that are operated and sanctioned by the state and the formal market (Bayat 2000: 546). It is not, however, necessarily or self-consciously political. Yet simply because it does not intend to be political does not mean that it has no political impact.

Quiet encroachment is a useful way to understand some of the activities of the civil rights activists and the residents of De Vluchtkerk who simply want the opportunity to live “a normal life”. They attempt as far as possible to engage in normal everyday activities, such as cooking, sleeping, surfing the internet, going to church or mosque. Yet in pursuing these ordinary activities, the residents are challenging the authority of the state and the boundaries that the state sets for them to exist within. We shall explore this further below.

However, I also think quiet encroachment is applicable to the ordinary everyday actions of religious actors, particularly to their spiritual rituals, such as prayer, fasting and charity. A nun who chooses to pray with an asylum seeker about the circumstances in which the asylum seeker finds themselves, for example, is not simply performing a religious ritual to bring comfort to the asylum seeker, but is performing an act of insurrection. The prayer to alter the circumstances challenges the existing system of political belonging, and calls on the transcendent order to alter and change the immanent reality. In this way, quiet encroachment may provide a bridge between immanent insurrection and transcendent insurrection, enabling actors to perform activities in the immanent that have transcendent implications and, conversely, to perform activities targeted largely at the transcendent yet have implications for the immanent. Thus, quiet encroachment is a critical component of both immanent insurrection and transcendent insurrection.

Where immanent insurrection focuses on the transformation of this-worldly circumstances and the use of everyday activities as modes for that transformation, transcendent insurrection is focused on otherworldly acts that challenge or alter immanent realities, alongside acts (otherworldly or everyday) that attempt to change transcendent realities. By this I mean that not only do they present an alternative interpretation of how transcendent realities are constituted and the values they are based on, countering dominant beliefs about the transcendent with alternatives, they actually endeavor to change those transcendent realities through dialogue with divine beings, prayer, supplication, fasting or other acts. My understanding of transcendent insurrection draws on the theology of hope, and views transcendence as primarily eschatological, rather than purely spatial (Erickson 1998: 343). It encompasses a view sometimes referred to as “now and not yet” – the transcendent reality does exist now, but it exists outside the immanent reality, in another dimension that is only partly accessible from the immanent reality.

I include prayer, fasting, singing, sharing communion, in sacred acts that are used to challenge established immanent and transcendent orders, because from a theological perspective these acts are an attempt to bridge the gap between the immanent and the transcendent. As Karl Barth wrote, “to clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the world” (quoted in Leech, 1980: 68).

While I have defined immanent as what is immediately visible, present and impacts on people’s lived experiences, I understand transcendent as an alternative, existential reality that is not immediately visible, that exists outside the laws of time and space that govern the immanent, that offers a more just, more equal, more inclusive, more perfect reality than that found in the immanent, one that does impact on people’s lived experiences, but incompletely and is as yet not fully known or realised. As such, I am defining transcendent in primarily eschatological terms (Erickson 1998: 343). In some ways, then, my understanding of immanent is primarily spatial, whereas my understanding of transcendent is both spatial and eschatological. For faith-based actors, there is a

transcendent reality that will one day become an immanent reality, and their activities are an attempt to bring that transcendent reality closer, to bring the immanent more in line with the transcendent. These definitions are also an attempt to understand and theorize the perspectives of religious actors.

Importantly, because this definition recognizes that the transcendent is not yet fully known or fully realized, it also allows space for actors to attempt to intervene in the transcendent, to challenge and alter the decisions and structures on which it is based. Examples of such transcendental insurrection include Abraham pleading with God not to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18: 20-33), King Hezekiah's plea for more time (Isaiah 38) and God's decision not to destroy the city of Nineveh after all (Jonah 3).

Within transcendent insurrection, I include the use of beliefs about transcendent realities that challenge immanent forms and structures, particularly beliefs about the values on which transcendent reality is based and on who is included and excluded from the community (or communities) that exist in that transcendent reality. Such beliefs can be progressive, emancipatory and peaceful, or they can be conservative, reactionary and violent. For the purposes of the cases I am looking at here, I consider contributions from progressive theologies, particularly Letty M. Russell's theology of hospitality. Yet notions about the nature of transcendence, at least within Christian theologies, are almost always based on understandings of the nature of God. As such, I also explore some conceptions of the nature of God that inform the way in which some Christian actors think about transcendence and consequently conceptualise their actions as part of movements for social change.

Russell's work conceptualizes hospitality as the practice of welcome of all people and the whole creation (Russell 2008: 24). She understands hospitality as '*solidarity with strangers*, a mutual relationship of care and trust in which we share in the struggle for empowerment, dignity and fullness of life' (Russell 2008: 20, emphasis in original). This hospitality is practiced in the immanent, but

is informed by the transcendent. It is based on God's radical welcome of all, because 'in God's eyes no one is a misfit' (Russell 2008: 18).

This radical hospitality toward one another is intended to reflect God's radical hospitality toward each one of us. Such a perspective suggests that God is always in the place of the host, while humanity is always conceptualized as in the place of the guest. Yet, Karl Barth, for example, has referred to God as the absolute unknown other. "God is separated from humanity by an *infinite* qualitative distinction. There is within humans no spark of affinity with the divine, no ability to produce divine revelation, no remainder in them of a likeness to God... Nor is he really known by us. He is the hidden one; he cannot be discovered by our effort, verified by our intellectual proofs, or understood in terms of our concepts" (discussed in Erickson 1998: 340). Emphasising God's nature as "other" whilst at the same time being the one who welcomes us also encourages us to see each other as both host and guest, recognizing the mutuality of humanity, that all are fallen yet all are also saved. In Russell's words, 'hospitality is a two-way street of mutual ministry where we often exchange roles and learn the most from those whom we considered different or "other"' (Russell 2008: 20).

The work of Soren Kierkegaard has also influenced the way both religious and secular thinkers understand transcendence. His concept of dimensional beyondness offers a useful way to define the transcendent. God exists in a different dimension altogether from human beings, but also, he is qualitatively different. So when we speak of transcendence we are speaking of both a different spatial dimension but also a different quality or essence, different characteristics. (Erickson 1998: 342). As Erickson has termed it, "God is spiritually and metaphysically other than humans and nature" (Erickson 1998: 341).

"God is in the same place we are, yet he is not accessible to us in a simple way, for he is in a different dimension. He is on a different level or in a different realm of reality... God is near us; his presence and influence are everywhere. Yet because he is in a spiritual realm of reality, we cannot get from ourselves to him by mere

geographical locomotion. It requires a change of state to make that transition, a change that usually involves death.” (Erickson 1998: 342)

A final theological influence that forms part of the conception of transcendence I deploy here is the theology of hope. The theology of hope, first articulated by Jurgen Moltman, is an historical rather than cosmological perspective on transcendence. This theology understands God as existing in all time – past, present and future – as well as outside of time. It presents a God who is “living and functioning where we have not yet been” (Erickson 1998: 343). It is this dimension of transcendence that provides the inspiration for religious actors in such arenas as the civil rights movement and the rights of asylum seekers and stateless persons. In the alternate, transcendent reality, those presently excluded by immanent world orders are welcomed and included. The activism then becomes an act of service and worship to God in an effort to make this transcendent reality more real and more present in the immanent.

The implications of this view of God and of transcendent reality is that humanity is not the pinnacle of existence and what exists now is not the highest heights that humanity can reach. There is another reality, both within and outside of our present reality, that is only partially known, but that possesses more complete forms of justice, equality and emancipation than what we are presently experiencing. As such, transcendent insurrection may be another way of conceptualizing the failure of modernity in the Middle East that Nevzat Soguk has spoken of:

*For all their successes in controlling the material worlds, what modernity and its derivative ideologies have never been able to dominate fully are the thought-worlds in these places. They have measured, categorized, and ordered all that is solid in the Arab-Islamic world, for example, but have failed to control that which they could not see, nor appreciate upon seeing—the rich and diverse thought-worlds anchored in a 1,000-year-old asabiyah, that distinct political consciousness, that counterplot to the European vanity that modernity is the apex of history and*

*Europe is its supreme author* (Soguk 2011: 596).

In the same way, modernity and secularism have never been able to fully control the thought-worlds of religions anywhere, although arguably there is a complex relationship of competing control and domination between modernity and some versions of Christianity. Religions have their own perspectives on what truly “matters”, on what the ultimate concerns and principles of life are, that sometimes complement and sometimes conflict with modernity and especially secularism’s perspectives on these dimensions of human life. The emergence of post-secularism and the disenchantment with modernity arguably facilitate the contributions of religions to ongoing debates around these and other critical issues.

#### *Martin Luther King Jr and the civil rights movement*

I now move to discuss two examples that I think are representative of both immanent and transcendent insurrectional politics – the civil rights movement, although I will particularly focus on the writings of Martin Luther King, and a contemporary movement known as ‘De Vluchtkerk’ – literally “Refugee Church”, currently taking place in Amsterdam. Both movements challenge dominant social, political and economic structures of belonging and exclusion and offer alternative, non-secular (though not incompatible with secular) visions.

Religious actors are insurrectional firstly and primarily when they challenge secular immanent frames of reference. In part this is the foundation of the postsecular turn in IR (Mavelli and Petito 2012: 936). Yet, as the description of this panel observes, insurrectional movements may be radical but not progressive or emancipatory. Examples of religious actors who are radical but not necessarily progressive or emancipatory include conservative right-wing Christian evangelicals, the BJP in India and the Taliban to name but a few.

However, the same name has been given to both these conservative religious actors and to more progressive ones – extremists. Indeed, Martin Luther King was described as an extremist *by other members of the clergy*, not simply by opponents of the civil rights movement more generally, but by ministers who were generally supportive of the goal of civil rights but did not approve of the civil disobedience campaign of which King was a central figure (King 1990: 73).

In *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*, King notes:

*“though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label. Was not Jesus an extremist for love: ‘Love your enemies, bless them that persecute you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.’ Was not Amos an extremist for justice: ‘Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.’ Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: ‘I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.’ Was not Martin Luther an extremist: ‘Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God.’ And John Bunyan: ‘I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience.’ And Abraham Lincoln: ‘This nation cannot survive half slave and half free.’ And Thomas Jefferson: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...’ So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists will we be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary’s hill three men were crucified. We must never forget that all three were crucified for the same crime – the crime of extremism. Two were extremists for immorality, and thus fell below their environment. The other, Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.”*

So often, particularly in International Relations, extremism is considered “bad” and associated with anti-democratic, exclusionary, discriminatory movements.



Yet, as King notes, there have also been a plethora of other extremists, who have instead been extremists for justice, equality, and emancipation (King 1990: 74). It is not being an extremist that is necessarily bad, according to King, but the type of extremist that we are. This suggests that insurrectional politics, variously conceived, is arguably always enacted by extremists, but extremists from a wide variety of commitments and backgrounds. These extremists are always “unsafe” for established powers and always challenge existing power structures, but whether their challenge leads to more oppression, different kinds of oppression, or an end to oppression is unclear. It would be interesting to further explore the possible interconnections between insurrectional politics and King’s call for ‘creative extremists’. Perhaps another term for insurrectional politics may be “creative extremism”.

A second point to emerge from *Letter from the Birmingham Jail* is that in understanding religion as insurrectional politics, it is helpful to recognize a challenge to *all* established powers. Religious insurrectional movements, particularly in contemporary Western societies, obviously challenge established secular political orders, and even established alternative secular political movements, because they bring religious argumentation into the public sphere, they promote alternative religious worldviews and they confront people to consider the possibility of an external, eternal, other-worldly reality.

At the same time, however, these religious movements, or religious actors within movements, also challenge established religious authorities and established religious interpretations and worldviews of the *kind* of external, eternal, other-worldly reality that exists. Across both religious and secular powers, religious actors are both immanently insurrectional and transcendently insurrectional. King and his followers unsettled the religious authorities of the day and made them uncomfortable by challenging the established order.

The civil rights movement was immanently insurrectional in a number of ways. Firstly, it challenged the established rules and authorities of the day, both secular

and religious. Secondly, participants were encouraged to do ordinary, everyday acts intentionally as acts of insurrection – eating a meal, drinking a cup of coffee, sitting in a seat – all ordinary acts in and of themselves, but insurrectional because at the time they were illegal. Thirdly, it challenged widespread beliefs about who should be entitled to what, where and why.

Yet the civil rights movement was also transcendently insurrectional. The most obvious way in which it was transcendental is through the language of King himself. Linking the actions of the movement (and himself) to those of Jesus, Amos, Paul and so on positions it within an eternal frame, a system and structure of justice that does not depend on the immanent and which is more enduring and more significant than the presently existing this-worldly reality in which he and his supporters found themselves. Secondly, though, as well as utilizing ordinary, everyday immanent activities such as eating, drinking, sitting, walking, the movement also employed activities that provided a bridge between the immanent and the transcendent – prayer, singing worship songs, church services. These religious or spiritual acts became vehicles through which activists drew on the transcendent reality in which they believed and endeavoured to channel its energies and its principles into the immanent reality in which they found themselves.

Thirdly, the movement was transcendently insurrectional because it challenged (some) theological interpretations of who could and could not belong to the Kingdom of God. Both white supremacists and black nationalists have made the argument that their “other” is excluded from the Kingdom of God purely by virtue of their skin color (Stout 2004; King 1990). This theological argument enabled them to justify their pursuit of the oppression of the ‘other’. The civil rights movement argued instead that all were, could be and should be part of the transcendent Kingdom of God and should therefore all be entitled to the same rights and freedoms in the immanent.

*De Vluchtkerk as a form of religious insurrectional politics.*

My second example is a contemporary Dutch campaign revolving around Dutch asylum policy and the rights of failed asylum seekers and stateless persons. *De Vluchtkerk* emerged around a group of 120 irregular migrants in the Netherlands. The group had previously been living in a tent camp near the detention centre in Ter Apel, from which most of them had been released once their claim for asylum had been rejected and the government had been unable to deport them. Although there has been significant opposition and activism in relation to Ter Apel detention centre, until the last year, this has mostly come from concerned members of the Dutch community, rather than the irregular migrants themselves. Largely as a result of the growing size of the group, but also, arguably, because they are now known as *De Vluchtkerk*, their cause has achieved greater visibility in Dutch media and public discourse.

According to one of the volunteers I spoke to, the group of irregular migrants presently living in *De Vluchtkerk* initially came together after one migrant had his application for asylum rejected, but attempts by the state to deport him were also unsuccessful. The man was then released from Ter Apel detention centre and given enough money for the bus fare from the detention centre to the train station (not enough money for the train tickets as well though). However, the man was in a wheelchair and was unable to even board the bus. As a result, he simply remained by the side of the road near the detention centre. Other asylum seekers joined him as they were released, along with activists and supporters and so was established the Ter Apel refugee camp, in May 2012. Moved on from Ter Apel by the detention centre authorities, the group camped in the garden of a Protestant parish in Amsterdam, before again moving on to a tent camp in the Notweg in Osdorp, Amsterdam for two months. At the end of November 2012, the group were forcibly evicted from that tent camp and left with nowhere to go.

Then, on 2 December, a group of concerned citizens, most of whom (according to the volunteers I spoke to) were Christian but not affiliated with any particular church, occupied the old St Joseph's church in West Amsterdam. The former Catholic church is now privately owned but had been sitting empty for some time, while the owner decided what to do with it. The owner formally agreed to allow the migrants to stay in the church during the winter months, but as of 31 March, that agreement came to an end.

During the stay in the church, the campaign has gained substantial momentum and increased profile and attention from media and the local population. The support group that has sprung up around the group living in the church organized a number of events, including assisting the migrants to form a band that has performed several times at Paradiso, a major live music venue in Amsterdam, as well as parties and most recently at the demonstration organized in support of the migrants' cause in Museumplein on 23 March. The concerts have also helped to raise money to support the refugees while they live in the church. Another group of migrants also wrote and performed a play, in Dutch, to try and explain their predicament to a wider audience. None of these forms of campaigning is particularly revolutionary. Related to my fourth overall point, however, I wonder whether the use of religious images/narratives and to a lesser extent art represent forms of insurrectional politics in and of themselves. Perhaps that is why religion and art are so frequently the tools of insurrectional political actors – because we have been told that religion and art are *not* politics, that they are separate from politics, still part of civil society and the public sphere, but not part of the serious business of politics.

I visited the church for the first time the evening before the demonstration and also attended the demonstration the following day. While I was there, I spoke to several volunteers, some in-depth, some briefly, as well as a number of the residents of the church. I wanted to find out about the campaign itself, the people involved, but also the role of religion.

Religion is necessarily a part of this campaign because most of the migrants involved are themselves religious, either Christian or Muslim. The migrants are mostly African, coming from Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Sierra Leone and Eritrea, amongst others. One of the refugees I spoke to believed that people helping the campaign were only able to do so because they had been given a gift to empathise and see the needs of others. When I asked him where this gift came from, he said from God. One of the volunteers I spoke to also believed that, regardless of whether people were religious or not, the Holy Spirit prompted people to take action. These conceptions relate to the notion of transcendental insurrection as I have articulated above – an external, other-worldly reality that impacts on this world, a more perfect, more just, more equal reality than that which exists in the immanent and which endeavours to reform the immanent to be more like the transcendent.

Religious groups have been involved in the campaign for a long time prior to the migrants moving into the church, but the move to the church has made religion a more central, explicit component of the campaign. There is also general consensus that the group became more publicly visible, with more media and public interest, following the move to the church. The volunteers had differing opinions as to why this is a case. One thought that it was simply the fact that they now had a building, rather than living in tents. Others, however, thought the fact that the building was a church had been strategically significant for the campaign and enabled them to attract additional attention and support for the cause of the asylum seekers. Arguably, too, the move to the church, which was spearheaded by an informal group of religiously affiliated individuals has also prompted greater involvement from the more formal established churches in the migrants' cause.

But even without this, religion forms an important part of the narratives that have built up around the campaign, the relationships amongst the migrants, the supporters and the activists and the ways in which they undertake their campaign.

The volunteers made a distinction between themselves, who they referred to as “supporters”, and “activists”. The activists are members of pre-existing organized secular groups, including No Borders and Young Socialists, amongst others. According to the volunteers, some of the activists were very antagonistic towards the role of religion in the campaign, refusing to refer to the building as “De Vluchtkerk”, instead simply saying “Vlerk” (which in Dutch means “wing”). A few weeks ago, the supporters organized to take the migrants away to the beach for a few days to discuss and plan what they wanted to do following the end of their stay in the church, where they wanted to go next and what they wanted to happen to the campaign. The activists were very critical of this, accusing the supporters of wanting to “brainwash” and indoctrinate the migrants into religion – yet interestingly not all the supporters are religious.

For the supporters, the role of religion is much less confronting or antagonistic. Many, though by no means all, of the supporters are themselves religious. The church is in an area where there is a large Turkish population and they have received substantial in-kind support through deliveries of food. One volunteer explained that this was because in Muslim culture it was unacceptable to allow your neighbor to go to bed hungry when you could do something about it. Other volunteers who work at the church come from Christian backgrounds, though not all of them are still practicing. They work shifts at the church, answering questions that the migrants have about the campaign, about letters they have received from Dutch authorities, amongst other things. There are also volunteer legal advisors, doctors and psychologists who visit the church to provide support for the migrants.

The supporters are very adamant that the campaign needs to be primarily driven by the migrants and what they want, not by broader political agendas. For example, one activist group initially refused to support the demonstration held on 23 March because it did not go far enough in its demands (it was not demanding an end to all political borders, it simply wanted a solution for this group of asylum seekers so they could live a normal life). In a sense this attitude represents the principles behind Russell’s theology of hospitality – the

supporters provide services, food, and other forms of hospitality to the migrants, but see themselves as guests of the migrants in the campaign.

Yet this attitude of the supporters is perhaps undermined by the role of the Diakoni of the Protestant church in managing the finances. The church has been the point through which the wider public has been able to make donations to the cause and has also paid a substantial amount of money itself to make up the shortfall between the donations and the costs of living in the church (approximately 40-45000 euros). What occurs is that the church has made decisions about the use of these funds, whereas the migrants were under the impression that they would just be given the money. This has caused some tensions and misunderstandings amongst the migrants and the volunteers, most of whom have nothing to do with the financial decision-making, but are perceived as the face of the church.

Perhaps the most visible presence of religion in the campaign was during the march and demonstration. The refugees who joined the march held up signs saying:

“Jezus was ook een vluchteling” – Jesus was also a refugee

“Pardon IND, Nous te demandons Grace” – IND (Dutch Immigration Authority), we ask for grace

By referencing religious figures and principles, these campaigning tools are again hinting at the existence of a transcendent reality that can be drawn on to influence and change the immanent reality, a form of transcendental insurrection. It suggests an alternative idea of belonging and community that challenges the predominant state-based structures of belonging that currently exclude these migrants and prevent them from living a normal life.

Reminiscent of the criticisms King received from other clergy during the civil rights campaign, several religious groups have been critical of De Vluchtkerk and the groups supporting it. The Working Group of the Council of Churches in Amsterdam has publicly stated that De Vluchtkerk gave false hope to the asylum seekers. “The situation of the Vluchtkerk asylum seekers has not improved at all. A few of them may have a small chance on obtaining a residence permit, but most of them do not have positive outlooks. They are just stalling for time” (Schippers, quoted in De Pijter 2013). According to Ingrid Schippers from the working group, the asylum seekers would have been better off in detention centres rather than in the church over the last few months, since at the last detention centres are warm, and in the end the outcome for most of them will be the same. As such, the campaign has made established religious authorities uncomfortable, as well as trying to challenge established state laws and policies.

Yet others are adamant the campaign has been useful – living in the church for three months has meant that the asylum seekers have had more support than if they had been living on the street, they have also been able to have more autonomy than had they been in a detention centre (migrants in Dutch detention centres have no access to internet, are only allowed two visits from outsiders per week and are kept in a small cell with one other asylum seeker. They have no means for entertaining themselves and cannot train themselves in the language or anything else). In this way, the movement has been immanently insurrectional – the refugees have lived, as much as possible, a “normal life”. Indeed, this has been one of the oft-repeated catch phrases of the campaign “I just want a normal life”. They have cooked, cleaned, slept, watched television, checked email, surfed the internet, played table tennis, all of which are normal, everyday acts that form part of this immanent world. Yet the context in which they undertake these acts makes them insurrectional.

Living in De Vluchtkerk has also made them visible. The general public has become more aware that Dutch asylum policy is failing. And, as the support group for De Vluchtkerk point out, while there are a wide variety of opinions as to what is best for the refugees and what the next steps should be, the only thing



that should count is how they themselves want to continue. This attitude on the part of the support group is also reflective of dimensions of what I have elsewhere termed “faithful hospitality”, where religious actors make use of the moral and societal power and influence that they possess in order to give power to an otherwise disenfranchised and marginalized group (Wilson 2013), against the established power of the state.

### *Conclusion*

Religious groups are insurrectional in numerous ways, but ways that can, I think, be understood as immanently insurrectional and transcendently insurrectional. This paper has explored these concepts through drawing on the work of theologians, sociologists and political scientists as well as examples of insurrectional politics, namely the civil rights movement in the United States, specifically the politics of Martin Luther King Jr, and the contemporary Dutch campaign, De Vluchtkerk. Yet as both these examples make clear, the relationship between the religious and the secular in insurrectional politics is complex. Religion is insurrectional insofar as it challenges dominant secular modes of political activity, organization and belonging, yet religious and secular activists and forms also work together to challenge immanent structures of injustice, oppression and marginalization. Further, while this paper has dealt exclusively with progressive Christian examples of insurrectional politics, there is a need to explore how immanent and transcendent insurrection manifests amongst conservative, reactionary movements, from Christian and other religious traditions.

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It is for these reasons (Post)Secular Turn that I would like to test this hypothesis and see whether material wealth, i.e. students'™ income, affects their religiousness. Gender as a determinant of religiousness has been widely discussed by the feminist theorists. 3) Participation in charity activities of the local religious community (42 per cent answered "sometimes", and 50 per cent "never"); 4) Reading religious books (39 per cent answered "sometimes", and 53 per cent "never") How this fact has an impact on their attitude toward politics and shapes their political attitudes is to be seen in this paper. However, since the scope of the paper is limited, the author will focus on two main issues expressed as working hypotheses which we will try to prove.