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Harvey Nichols Fashion Shows, Vintage Fairs, and the Holy Eucharist: Manchester Cathedral as Post-Secular Place

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ABSTRACT

In my studies of the public theology of Manchester Cathedral, one area of my research has been to understand how the space of a Cathedral has (and is) being reconfigured in a post-secular age. Jürgen Habermas coined the term 'post-secularity' in 2001 to describe the phenomenon of the breakdown between conceptual categories of the secular and the sacred. For Habermas, the secular thesis of modernity had in some ways failed, and the resurgence of religion in the public sphere presented and still presents challenges of how our common life can be built together in an age of pluralism and globalisation. I want to demonstrate in this paper the ways in which Manchester Cathedral navigates this post-secular reality and attempts to provide a sense of place in the context of increasing plurality in the region of Greater Manchester.

KEYWORDS

Cathedral, Post-secular, Jürgen Habermas, Public sphere, Sacred space

Introduction

I am a researcher at the University of Manchester doing a collaborative project with Manchester Cathedral entitled Critically Evaluate the Public Theology of Manchester Cathedral.[1] The project is an in-depth case study which analyses the continuing participation of Manchester Cathedral in the public sphere through its various activities and networks. When I read the description of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network conference and the theme 'dreaming of another place' I could not help but see the connections with the research I have been doing at Manchester Cathedral. This is because the current leadership and Chapter at Manchester Cathedral collectively dream of 'another place' and create networks and activities to help achieve their vision of a just and flourishing society. Manchester Cathedral's religious and theological vision is shaped by the belief that all of humanity is created and loved by God, and therefore all humans share in this common humanity. Therefore, the Cathedral's dreams of another place tend to centre around the values of inclusion and diversity. The Cathedral attempts to be a space of common ground, or an inclusive public place, that provides a sense of community and meaning in the context of Greater Manchester, which is a region characterised by the diversity of its citizens.

In this paper I will show how Manchester Cathedral navigates the social dynamics present within a post-secular environment as it attempts to be a common place for people of all faiths and non. I will firstly describe the concept of post-secularism as this provides a significant

1 I would like to thank the dean, Chapter, clergy, and other staff at Manchester Cathedral who have made this project possible. The information and data presented in this article are either from sources available in the public domain or have been acquired during recorded interviews. All the data used from recorded interviews has been used in accordance with the written consent given by participants.

context for understanding the enduring presence of Cathedrals, and religion more broadly, in British society.[2] I will then demonstrate how Manchester Cathedral's post-secular character blurs the lines between the sacred and the secular, insider and outsider, and dominant public spheres and subaltern counterpublics. Finally, I will discuss the implications and potentials for post-secular institutions that aim towards facilitating common spaces.

Religion in the post-secular public sphere

One of the key questions that I seek to address in my research on the public theology of Manchester Cathedral is to ask what the public sphere is, how it should be fostered, and what role religion should play within it. The work of Jürgen Habermas is foundational for the interrogation of the concept of the public sphere and the role that religions can play in public life.[3] However, in order to understand Habermas's argument for the continuing significance of religion in democratic societies we need to attend to his concept of the post-secular.

Habermas coined the term 'post-secular' in his 2001 speech *Faith and Knowledge* (Habermas 2003). He used this term to describe the continuing, and somewhat surprising, significance and presence of religion in society despite the impact of secularism, particularly in the West. The secular thesis in its most basic form predicted that the more enlightened we became as a society, through scientific rationality, the less religious we would become (Graham 2013, 12).

For example, in 1959 the sociologist C. Wright Mills wrote:

> Once, the world was filled with the sacred - in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the reformation and renaissance, the forces of modernisation swept across the globe and secularisation, a morally historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogether, except possibly in the private realm (1959, 32-33).

However, there is common consensus among sociologists that these predictions have proven to be incorrect. In Europe, whilst church attendance might be declining, the deinstitutionalisation of Christianity has led to the emergence of a plurality of forms of religious adherence and practice. For example, the rise in the language of people identifying as 'spiritual but not religious' and the emergence of new religious movements demonstrate an increase in fascination with the sacred without being mediated by institutional forms of belief and practice. In addition, the rise of fundamentalist radicalisation demonstrates that religion is not disappearing from public view (Habermas 2008b, 18).

These realities led Peter Berger, who was once a proponent of the secular thesis, to argue:

> The world today, with some exceptions [...] is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labelled 'secularization theory' is essential mistaken (1999, 2).

It is important to note that we cannot reject the secularisation thesis altogether as religion,

2 Given that my research question is about Manchester Cathedral, much of my research is understood within and applied to a British context. I hope however, that readers who read from another context will still find this paper relevant.

3 Habermas's 1962 book *The Structural transformation of the public sphere* lays the foundation for his subsequent political philosophies.

despite its new visibility, is not visible in the same way as in previous eras. As Elaine Graham reminds us, 'The "post" in "post-secularity" does not mean "not secular" but names the instability of the label secular' (2017, 38). Graham further argues elsewhere that both the church and wider society are caught between two experiences: secularism and the new visibility of religion (2013, 3). For Habermas, this does not mean insignificance of religion, nor does it indicate the potential for religions to dominate the public sphere. Rather, the new visibility of religion requires the need to understand the proper significance of religion within democratic societies (2008a, 5-8).

Particularly in his later work, Habermas has been keen to find the proper place of religion in a healthy and flourishing public sphere. For Habermas, the public sphere is the realm in which individuals gather as citizens to reason and debate, with the intention of achieving consensus about issues of public concern, in order to influence the political realm. Importantly, the public sphere must be free of control and domination by the state, a religious group, or any other faction. Yet for Habermas, there is a tension between secular, naturalistic world views, and religious world views that are represented within the public (2008b, 1-4).

Habermas argues that increasingly, in part due to the recent advances of brain research, robotics, and biogenetics, there is a 'hard' secularism that adopts a naturalistic worldview in which understandings about action and communication are understood through objectifying categories of natural science. On the other hand, despite the spread of these naturalistic worldviews, religious communities and traditions seem to be revitalised, and increasingly engaged in political arenas. He argues that a more generous approach to religious traditions understands them to be part of the history of reason, and thus has the capability of communicating with the secular what might be missing in purely naturalistic forms of reason. He states:

> Even today, religious traditions perform the function of articulating an awareness of what is lacking or absent. They keep alive a sensitivity to failure and suffering. They rescue from oblivion the dimensions of our social and personal relations in which advances in cultural and social rationalization have caused utter devastation (2008a, 6).

Thus, Habermas's philosophy is agnostic in that his arguments about religion in the public sphere do not depend on any metaphysical claims. Rather, his post-secular approach seeks to understand how the religious and the secular can interact with one another to foster moral energy in the public sphere (2008b, 209-248).

Therefore, the post-secular theory recognises the continual presence of religion within society, despite it taking different forms to previous eras. As a result, this post-secular environment demonstrates the need to develop practices and theories through which religious and non-religious participants in the public sphere can be open to joint discovery of meaning through dialogue and interaction with one another. This is the context in which I want to analyse Manchester Cathedral as a post-secular place. While Habermas and others might theorise about the role religions should play in the public sphere, it is important to attend to those religious institutions that are already involved in public life to see what may be learned about religions in the public sphere.

Introducing Manchester Cathedral

It is perhaps surprising that despite the frequent claims that we live in an increasingly secular society, Cathedrals still play a significant role in public life. For example, Simon Oliver argues:

> When bombs explode on our streets, a member of the Royal family dies, a nation remembers its war dead, or a national charity wants to celebrate the anniversary of its founding, we default to a more substantial and enduring 'middle', the Cathedral, which […] provides an expression of unity and hope that exceeds the chaotic pluralities of modern society. It is a genuine via media, lying comprehensively in the middle of public and private, sacred, and secular, heaven and earth (2017, 31).

This assessment from Oliver is no less true of Manchester Cathedral. Manchester Cathedral is a small Cathedral in comparison to other Cathedrals such as Lincoln Cathedral or Norwich Cathedral. In fact, it is one of the smallest Cathedrals in this country, both in terms of its physical size and with a comparatively small staffing body that oversee its operations. Yet, despite its size Manchester Cathedral is a busy Cathedral, in that it not only attracts visitors and tourists into its doors daily, but it frequently plays host to a range of public events and activities. For worship, the Cathedral is used for regular Eucharist services, daily morning and evening prayer and choral evensong services. It is used by prayer groups and is often used by other church-based organisations for their events.

The dean frequently hosts forums in which discussions and debates about prevalent social issues, such as racism and hate crime, are discussed. For example, on 28 October 2021, the Cathedral held their inaugural Thomas Clarkson day, which is a now annual event celebrating the abolitionist work of Thomas Clarkson, who gave a speech in Manchester Cathedral campaigning against the transatlantic slave trade. The speech led to tremendous support from the city and was thus a momentous milestone in the history of the abolition movement. This event focused on the roles religions can play in tackling modern racism in contemporary society with a keynote lecture given by a professor from the University of Manchester, Dr. Andrew Boakye. The event also focused on the continuing problems of modern slavery. Therefore, the Cathedral was filled with stalls from organisations that are involved in various ways in working against modern slavery in British societies.

Further, the Cathedral's social justice activity consistently takes a thoroughly interreligious character, in which people from different faith backgrounds, and those who do not adhere to any religion are invited to participate. The dean of the Cathedral, Rogers Govender, explained to me, using the topic of climate change as an illustration:

> Climate change affects all people. Not just Christians or Hindus or Muslims. It affects all of us. So, all of us have got to tackle it together because it is part of our common interest and need to preserve our environment for the good of everybody: for the common good. I think if we understand religion in a tribal and insular way then I think we have misunderstood religion and God.

These events and activities give a limited picture of the types of events that the Cathedral is used for and the character of the Cathedral. However, the Cathedral is also used for what some may refer to as more 'profane' events. For example, the Cathedral has used the space as a concert venue for rock bands, solo artists such as Alicia Keys, orchestras, choirs, and other types of musical ensembles. The space is sometimes used for whiskey, rum, and gin festivals. Harvey Nichols has used the space for several fashion shows there in which a catwalk has been erected down the middle of the Cathedral Nave where the models display the garments. There are quite often vintage fairs, where the Cathedral is turned into a kind of marketplace filled with

different stalls from individuals and businesses.

There are many other types of commercial events that the Cathedral hosts. When I asked Govender and the director of development and fundraising if there were any limits to what the Cathedral could rent the space out for, they said 'we will not accept anything that is dehumanising or goes against the Cathedral's values of inclusion and diversity'. For example, Govender said to me in another recorded interview 'we will not host any organisation or event associated with racism or homophobia'.

In recent years some Cathedrals have made their way into the news because of the commercial activities that they have hosted within their walls. For example, in August 2019 Norwich Cathedral erected a fully sized helter-skelter in its nave which some have deemed to be an unprofessional move by the Cathedral team.[4] Another example could be seen in July of 2019 when Rochester Cathedral installed a crazy golf course down its central aisle, which also received criticism.[5] However, Manchester Cathedral under the current leadership has been using its space for 'secular' commercial activities for the last twelve years. The first event of this kind that took place was in November 2009 when the band Grizzly Bear performed a rock concert.

In the following sections I will argue that Manchester Cathedral's decision to host commercial events is deeply significant in its attempts to foster a common place within Greater Manchester, as it blurs several traditional lines often operational between different groups of people. I will demonstrate how the Cathedral, in this way, blurs the lines between the sacred and the secular, insider and outsider, and divisions between dominant publics and subaltern counterpublics.

Cathedrals and commercial activity: Blurring the lines between the sacred and secular

This recent turn to the use of Cathedrals for commercial purposes can only be understood once one understands the financial context in which Cathedrals operate. Cathedrals in Britain largely depend on tourist donations and regular congregation-based offerings in order to cover their costs. However, with increasing costs associated with maintaining a building as old as a Cathedral, visitor donations and congregational offerings are not, for many Cathedrals, meeting the financial needs of the buildings. Manchester Cathedral is no exception to this reality. While some Cathedrals have a large portfolio of other properties that keep the income flowing in (or are at least available to sell in order to meet the financial needs of the Cathedral), Manchester Cathedral does not. The increasingly troubling financial situation led the current Dean of the Cathedral to create and fill a position at the Cathedral titled 'the director of fundraising and development'. The position was filled by Anthony O'Connor in September 2008. Among exploring other income streams, such as grants, O'Connor networked with several businesses in the city and advertised the Cathedral as a venue for commercial events.

On one level, we could simply see these activities and events nothing more than good business opportunity for the Cathedral. We could reduce it to a needs-must relationship whereby the Cathedral team tolerates these activities because they make the Cathedral financially viable to continue its 'real ministry' of prayer and worship. But I want to argue that this is not the case. In part this is because the post-secular reality that I have outlined at the beginning of this article does not allow us to reduce activities to purely secular or purely sacred. Instead, these commercial events contribute to the task of building a community of diverse people groups

4 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-49292493
5 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-49162116

within the city.

It is important to note, however, that the contemporary post-secular context is not the first in which Cathedrals have been used for 'profane' activities. During the medieval period Cathedrals would be used as a place for dances in the evening, and a marketplace during the day. This was before the Gothic Revival of the nineteenth century era when they filled Cathedrals with pews and reduced its activity to the purely sacred (Muskett 2019, 93-94). It was at this point that church halls were built outside of liturgical areas in order to keep mundane activity out of the sacred spaces.

As Anthony O'Connor said to me:

> The Victorians then came along and the filled these churches with pews and basically made it so that you came in and you sat, and you faced east, and you had your heads down praying. What we are trying to do is to really look at bringing the medieval concept back. Where churches are places for the community and the centres of our community, so they come together to work. On a Saturday then they would come and have a dance on a Saturday night, and they would come together and pray on a Sunday morning.

It is important to note that part of the reason that the medieval churches could conduct themselves in this way is because religion permeated every area of life for English citizens at that time. In our post-secular context however, this is not the case. Still, I think the recovery of the medieval approach, rather than the Victorian approach, in this post-secular Cathedral is also an attempt to resist the boundary-marking practices developed in the Victorian era. As Judith A. Muskett (2019) argues, part of the reason that the Victorian church adapted the spaces to only be used for 'sacred' activity, was to establish firm boundaries between the sacred and the profane. Therefore, while the turn to the medieval approach should not be understood as an attempt to go back to some golden age of Christendom, it should be recognised that the Cathedral is attempting to blur the lines between insiders and outsiders, public and private, sacred and secular, that were established in the Victorian period.

It is this dissolving of fixed binaries that is characteristic of post-secular religious organisations generally, and Manchester Cathedral specifically. The Cathedral becoming a common place in this way is thoroughly post-secular because through these activities, it refuses to accept the common assumption that the secular and the sacred should be kept strictly separate. While the Cathedral team recognises a difference between sacred and secular activities, Manchester Cathedral demonstrates the potential for overlaps of both. While Cathedrals are often referred to as both sacred spaces and common ground, these commercial events demonstrate the blurring of the lines between these aspects.

'Manchester Cathedral is your Cathedral': Blurring the lines between insider and outsider

Part of the reason for this turn at Manchester Cathedral is because the current Cathedral team has a particular vision and understanding of what type of place it should be in the context of the city of Manchester. During a round of interviews that I had with the Cathedral clergy, one phrase that was often repeated about the aims of Manchester Cathedral is that it aims to be 'a Cathedral for people of all faiths and non.' The Cathedral aims to be a spiritual hub for the city, that is inclusive and welcoming to all, regardless of personal beliefs. Further, the Cathedral

team want those in the city to understand that the Cathedral does not simply belong to the Established Church, but that it also belongs to those in the city.

The opening of the space in this way generates a sense of place in which diverse varieties of actors claim ownership of a specifically religious building, that is being used for a wide range of purposes, with the common theme of being an open, inclusive, and common space for all people. As a result, the lines between insider and outsider are blurred because the Cathedral does not require specific identity markers, such as religious adherence, in order for somebody to claim ownership of the Cathedral in some way.

One key example of the blurring of the line between insiders and outsiders is the use of art, and art exhibitions in Cathedrals. Cathedrals can host art exhibitions and have space to inquire and explore in the context of diverse community what the art itself is trying to teach. This is in part, because the Cathedral is a piece of art, in that it is an embodied reminder of the realities of life that go beyond what we can articulate only in words. Classical Christian theology argues that one aspect common to humans across all times and cultures is that we are oriented towards the beautiful. It is within the pursuit of the beautiful that we construct common meanings and visions of flourishing. Art is often the embodied expression and interpretation of these visions and meanings.

This is in part why, Nicola Slee argues, sponsorship of the arts is an ancient practice in the Church. She writes:

> Church sponsorship of the arts is, we might say, one very ancient example of public theology that seeks to create spaces for interaction of culture and religion in which both may be challenged, enriched and broadened […] Church buildings themselves are spaces in which the arts live and thrive and mingle, and they are significant public spaces in which conversation around the art can take place and analysis of the values enshrined in the works of art can be encouraged and in which the divide between insider and outsider can be blurred (2015, 25).

However, the blurring of the line between insiders and outsiders can sometimes produce tensions and moments of negotiation when the space is needed to be used for multiple activities at the same time. For example, during the summer of 2021 I attended a Sunday Eucharist service with some family and friends. I emailed one member of the clergy ahead of time just to let them know we were coming to the service, and they informed me that the service would be slightly different, due to an event happening in the evening. The Nave, which is usually used for Eucharist services, was out of bounds that day, because the space was being used in the evening by the National Youth Music Theatre who were putting on a production of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. As a result, the congregation were situated in the Cathedral's Regiment Chapel, a small chapel on one side of the Cathedral. The congregation were less spaced apart and the clergy at the front were much closer to the attendants. Further, the type of organ that was used was different. In short, the liturgy remained the same as it would have been in the Nave, but the way the liturgy was performed had to be adapted.

Thus, for the space to function in multiple capacities, there must be negotiations, compromises, and efforts made from both the Cathedral team and those using the space. In this case, the liturgy had to take place in another chapel, but the set-up crew for the performance could not work during the Sunday Eucharist liturgy. This is a small example of the everyday negotiations

that take place at Manchester Cathedral, but such interactions build the networks and relationships with the Cathedral and the city and blur the lines between insider and outsider.[6]

Host to the counterpublics: Blurring the lines between the dominant public sphere and subaltern counterpublic spheres.

However, the desire to be a common place and to blur the lines between insider and outsider can potentially, though perhaps unwittingly, still lead to forms of exclusion. To illustrate this point, an analysis of a critique of Habermas' work from the perspective of feminist theorist Nancy Fraser (1990) demonstrates how exclusions can be present even in attempts to be public. In his original portrayal of the history of the public sphere, Habermas suggested that the public sphere was exclusionary in terms of race and gender. For Habermas, the public sphere in its original construction was dominated by males, specifically white, European males (1962, 33). However, Fraser argues that this construal of the public sphere is to already subscribe to a notion of publicness that is masculinist. The result of which is to forget the ways in which women operated within competing public spheres, and to idealise the exclusionary liberal public sphere, which she argues is exactly what Habermas does (1990, 60-61). Because Habermas constructs the public sphere in such a way that the exclusions that took place in the bourgeois public spheres' emergence are accidental, he fails to recognize how the public sphere itself was a 'masculinist, ideological notion that functioned to legitimate an emergent form of class' (Fraser 1990, 66).

This is significant for my analysis, because it raises the question of whether institutions, such as Manchester Cathedral, that aim to be a common place do so with the same kind of homogenising presuppositions present in Habermas' theory? Because attempts at publicness can already assume forms of publicness that exclude minority groups and their understandings of reason, the good, politics, the social, etc. the question is raised whether the Cathedral's attempt to be a place for people of all faiths and non depends on the absorption of difference? i.e., does the Cathedral's blurring of the lines between insider and outsider do so at the cost of particularity?

However, I would argue that while this is a risk for institutions that aim towards finding common ground, it is not the only possible outcome. Attempts to form a common place can often lead to the exclusion of those who do not or cannot conform to dominant understandings of what it means to be human and to flourish in society. However, these groups do not simply dissolve because they are not accepted by dominant public spheres. Instead, these excluded people groups generate counterpublics that are governed by their own forms of reason.

I will quote Fraser (1990) at length here to show how these counterpublics form:

> This history records that members of subordinated social groups-women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics. I propose to call these subaltern counterpublics in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs. Perhaps the most striking example is the late-twentieth century U.S. feminist subaltern counterpublic, with its variegated array of

6 For more on the theme of contestation and negotiation in Cathedrals see Calvert (2019) pp. 523-540

> journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals, and local meeting places. In this public sphere, feminist women have invented new terms for describing social reality, including 'sexism', 'the double shift', 'sexual harassment', and 'marital, date, and acquaintance rape'. Armed with such language, we have recast our needs and identities, thereby reducing, although not eliminating, the extent of our disadvantage in official public spheres (1990, 67).

Thus, publicness can take numerous forms, and reason can be understood in a plurality of ways. It is my view that Cathedrals have the potential to use their space and power to convene together these subaltern counter publics, so that they may interact with other competing publics. In a sense, if the earlier quote from Simon Oliver is correct, Cathedrals can also act as a genuine middle between counterpublics and dominant public spheres. To put it another way, the Cathedral's theological commitment to our common humanity should not lead the Cathedral to believe it can subsume all of humanity into one overarching theory of what it means to be human. Instead, the Cathedral's commitment to common humanity can be ground upon which practices, with various visions and perspectives about what it means to be human, can be articulated and listened to. In this way, Cathedrals can potentially provide platforms and arenas in which the questions and perspectives raised in and through these counterpublics can be discussed and explored with diverse people groups.

Following from the above view that Cathedrals can be host to counterpublics and subaltern publics, Cathedrals can uniquely make room for various kinds of expressions and modes of reasoning often accepted by the most dominant public spheres. For example, Habermas assumes a narrow understanding of publicness as debate and dialogue. Even where Habermas allows for religious reasoning to be included, he does so with the view that both the religious participants and secular participants should thoroughly translate the religious argument into secular terms. However, this too narrow focus on 'rational debate' excludes other forms of knowledge and reason. For example, David Tracy argues that engagement with 'classics' whether they be in the context of religion, music or art, etc. enables us to discover together about our shared humanity, and to join in the task of meaning making. (Tracy 2014, 333-334).

Pushing the boundaries of what should be considered a 'classic', Stephen B. Roberts (2017), in an article entitled 'Beyond the classic: Lady Gaga and theology in the wild public sphere', argues that Lady Gaga acts as a public theologian in that through her music she generates and participates in a subaltern counterpublic sphere. Specifically, the public sphere she aims for is one that does not fit within the heteronormative dominant public sphere(s). Songs such as 'Born This Way' are 'classics' in that they articulate a vision of human diversity and beauty that a 'wild public' connects with (Roberts 2017, 163-187). Cathedrals are uniquely placed to be able to host an artist such as Lady Gaga and to subsequently explore the meanings of the music and the visions of human flourishing present within it.

These practices of engaging with 'classics' and art are significant in the engagement and hosting of subaltern counterpublics because subaltern counterpublics often articulate their social visions and understandings through the use of art. Importantly, the exploration of art, from all publics, as I have argued above, blurs the divides between insiders and outsiders. Thus, the use of Cathedral spaces for commercial purposes demonstrate that Cathedrals can host various events, with different purposes, for a variety of publics, which blurs distinctions between insiders and

outsiders, without necessarily absorbing the particularities of those who claim ownership of the Cathedral. Cathedrals, in short can host subaltern counterpublics which seek to articulate their own visions of human meaning and flourishing in ways that are not always deemed meaningful or reasonable by the dominant public spheres.

Post-secular activity and the building of social capital between the Cathedral and the city.

So far in this article I have tried to articulate an understanding of the present roles of Cathedrals, and specifically Manchester Cathedral, in their cities and the way that they seek to be a common place for a wide public in the context of post-secular societies. I want in this final section to make connections between the discussion of the nature of the public sphere and the roles that Cathedrals have in post-secular societies in order to demonstrate that Cathedrals have the capacity to generate a sense of place that multiple diverse publics can use in order to articulate their own perspectives on social issues and the continual task of living together in the context of diversity and pluralism.

As I have demonstrated, Habermas has been concerned to articulate a theory of the public sphere through which a flourishing public sphere can be developed for individuals to gather as citizens and discuss issues of common concern. Yet, one aspect of the possibility of generating a flourishing public sphere that is perhaps underappreciated by Habermas in his work is the necessity of social capital being generated between various groups.

Social capital is not a term exclusive to relationships between religious organisations and secular organisations together. As Robert Putnam, who is one researcher who has contributed to the concept being more widely adopted and used in different fields of study, describes social capital in this way:

> Social capital here refers to features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions (1994, 167).

However, while the term is used broadly to describe features of social organisation within society, applying this concept to religious communities that desire to engage in the public sphere is crucial. This is because religious communities and organisations are often viewed with suspicion. Niclas Berggren and Christian Bjørnskov conducted a study analysing the negative correlation between social trust and the importance of religion. They argue:

> The main reason to expect a negative effect, of the kind we have identified, is that religions may cause division and rift, both in that religious people may distrust those who do not share their beliefs and who are not subject to the same enforcement mechanisms as they are, and in that non-religious people may regard with suspicion those who take religiosity seriously (2011, 474).

Further, the mistrust and suspicion are not simply shared by religious communities and non-religious communities. Rather, subaltern counterpublics are also suspicious of dominant publics which have excluded them previously. If, as I have argued, Cathedrals are to be a common place in our contemporary post-secular environment then social capital must be generated in order for meaningful dialogues to take place between diverse people groups.

As Geir Skeie has argued, one way that social capital can be generated is through mutual participation in cultural activities (2019, 1-15). I suggest that Cathedrals hosting commercial, and supposedly 'profane' activities, contribute to its wider work of building a sense of place for different people groups, as Cathedrals such as Manchester Cathedral continually demonstrate its value as an inclusive space for multiple groups with multiple purposes. The openness to such activity has arguably generated trust between the Cathedral and inhabitants of the city, so that those who do not necessarily participate in the worship life of the Cathedral still see the Cathedral as its own.

When I talk with Cathedral staff at Manchester, one of the most significant events that gets brought up consistently is a memorial service that took place one year after the Manchester Arena bombing. The Cathedral was approached by key authority figures in the city to host this event because it has built a reputation over time as being a hospitable place that stands for peace and inclusion. As Jeremy Gregory writes:

> The Cathedral's position in the life of the city remains strikingly strong in the twenty-first century (arguably even stronger now than at some times in its past) and aspects of its contemporary role and symbolic influence, seen for example in the special services to mark particular Manchester events, such as those after the 2017 Manchester Arena bomb, echo the civic responsibilities and aspirations of its fifteenth-century founders (2021, 3).

I am arguing here that the Cathedral, through hosting multiple events of many different kinds, has generated social capital between various people groups who claim some sense of ownership of the Cathedral, seeing it as their Cathedral, and not simply the Church's Cathedral. As a result of this the Cathedral has built a reputation of being a welcoming and inclusive place and has therefore become a favoured space for the city to use for events that promote unity and peace. In a moment of great pain and grief in the city of Manchester, the Cathedral was turned to because it was seen to be a common place in which the needs of this diverse city could be met when it mattered most.

Conclusion

In this article I have tried to demonstrate how and why Cathedrals do, and should, play a continuing role in post-secular societies. Cathedrals are post-secular places, which blur the lines between sacred and secular, insider, and outsider, and often do this by hosting a variety of different events for different purposes within their walls. Further Cathedrals can play host to subaltern counterpublics, which blurs the lines between these and dominant public spheres. Rather than compartmentalising the work of Manchester Cathedral into strict boxes of religious, social justice, and commercial events, we have seen a blend and overlap of all these aspects of its work. Manchester Cathedral operates as a post-secular place where many different groups in its city can claim ownership is possible. It is my contention that Manchester Cathedral represents the productive possibilities of our contemporary post-secular environment whereby 'another place' can be collectively dreamt of in the context of discussion, debate, art, music, the Holy Eucharist, vintage fairs, and Harvey Nichols fashion shows.

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