10-2000

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REASSESSING RELIGION’S PLACE IN A LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

RELIGION AND CONTEMPORARY LIBERALISM
Edited by Paul J. Weithman
Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997
Pp. viii + 315. Cloth, $48.00; paper, $23.00.

RELIGION IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE: THE PLACE OF RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS IN POLITICAL DEBATE
By Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff
Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997
Pp. x + 180. Cloth, $55.00; paper, $17.95.

RELIGION IN PUBLIC LIFE: A DILEMMA FOR DEMOCRACY
By Ronald F. Thiemann

CHRISTIAN JUSTICE AND PUBLIC POLICY
By Duncan B. Forrester
New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997
Pp. xiv + 274. Cloth, $64.95; paper, $22.95.

CHRISTIANITY AND LIBERAL SOCIETY
By Robert Song
Pp. x + 250. $65.00.

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Two postulates about religion’s place in contemporary liberal democracies hold wide sway in academic literature. One is that religion is increasingly insignificant in public life; the other is that it is too divisive to be constructive in that forum. Take as representative of these positions two well-received works by leading French intellectuals. Marcel Gauchet’s The Disenchantment of the World (1997) argues that religion has finally come to its end in modern societies. The rise of the state some five millennia ago initiated the slow withdrawal of the gods from human society, a process brought to its logical conclusion by Christianity, which has unwittingly contributed to its own privatization. By contrast, Gilles Kepel holds that religion is back with a vengeance: around the world, religious groups and movements became significant political factors in the 1980s and 1990s. Kepel’s dismay at the resurgence of conservative political movements in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam is suggested by his title, The Revenge of God (1994). Although there are ways to hold onto a part of both theses simultaneously, in their strong forms they obviously contradict one another. Surely one of them must be correct? The books presently under review suggest another possibility: both theses are wrong.

Despite the perceptions of religion held by such writers as Gauchet and Kepel, scholars from a number of disciplines have been discovering and elucidating religion’s constructive role in liberal democratic societies. To Gauchet, these authors say that religion is by no means politically feeble; it has shaped and continues to shape the political, economic, and cultural systems that govern modern societies. To Kepel, they say that it is inappropriate to focus on the destructive aspects of religion, although they admit that religion is no panacea for a democracy. This rise of a more balanced and appreciative account of religion’s role in liberal democracy bodes well for both liberal political theory and Christian public theology. In this essay, I will consider several works that are representative of this trend. The literature relevant to the debate about religion and liberalism is immense; my limiting principle here is to focus on two kinds of recent works by American and British authors: those in which liberal philosophers and religious thinkers debate the role of religion in liberal society and those by Christian theologians and ethicists who explicitly engage contemporary liberal theory. These books demonstrate that the debate between religious thought and liberal theory has grown less strained and more constructive in the last few years.

The Liberalism of Reasoned Respect

Liberal democracy as a political system has been much in demand for its commitment to liberty, equality, human rights, and limited government. Witness, in the past decade, pro-democracy demonstrations in such countries as China, Indonesia, and Iran and the successful though fragile strides toward freedom under constitutional government in South Africa, Nicaragua, and the satellites and countries of the former Soviet Union. At the same time, the theory of liberalism is under fire as never before, even among defenders of the liberal democratic system. Scholars and the general public alike have been finding the liberal paradigm unsatisfying for numerous reasons, among which are its implications for religious citizens. To understand the works under review, we must first have a clear and sympathetic description of liberal democracy as a system and a theory.

Anyone who hazards a definition of liberal democracy hastens to add that there are a number of varieties. Liberalism, a family of philosophical thought with roots in the Enlightenment, prizes the rational self and seeks to protect the self’s liberties through commitments to limited government, human rights, and the free market. Democracy is a family of approaches to political organization wherein power ultimately resides with the people themselves, who, prototypically exercise it through the ballot. Liberalism and democracy tend to go hand in hand despite the tensions between the individualist motif of the former and the majoritarian motif of the latter. Making the linkage explicit, Nicholas Wolterstorff in Religion in the Public Square (1997) names four core ideas that animate liberal democracy: citizens enjoy equal protection and equal freedom under the law; through the vote they possess an equal voice in political decisions; and the state takes a position of neutrality regarding the diversity of religions and other worldviews within society. Then he adds two qualifications. First, this is an ideal type, for “no society is anything more or less a liberal democracy” (70). Second, the term liberal has come to apply both to existing liberal democracies—such as the US, the UK, Canada, and the Netherlands—and to a theoretical framework, “the liberal position.” The liberal position holds that the proper goal of political action is justice (or a broader social good that includes justice), the meaning of which is to be determined by a process that is neutral with regard to religious and other worldviews. These qualifications are points too often glossed over. Among other things, they entail that liberal democracies all deviate in some ways from the ideal of the liberal position. Liberal theorists will either have to make some room for these deviations,
including certain accommodations for religion, or show why and how they can justly be eliminated.

That the latter task is neither as simple nor as desirable as many liberal theorists have supposed is the view of most contributors to *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism*, a collection of eleven essays, which emerged from a conference held at the University of Notre Dame in 1996. For the purposes of the debate, Paul Weithman, the organizer of the conference and editor of the volume, coins the term "the liberalism of reasoned respect" (LRR). This strain of contemporary liberalism keys on the same ideas as those Wolterstorff identifies in the liberal position. With the goal of moving toward "an ideal well-ordered society of civility and mutual respect," proponents of LRR "attempt to isolate a set of values and principles that reasonable citizens could willingly and publicly endorse as the basis of that society’s political arrangements" (4).

Given the pluralism of modern societies, it is assumed that religious values and principles cannot serve this function. LRR seeks neither to marginalize nor privatize religious belief; it wants simply to identify the proper set of common values that can guide political cooperation. How is this to be done? For John Rawls, the most influential representative of LRR in the American academy, the shared base of values for a constitutional democracy is its own political culture as refined through the lens of public reason. *Public reason* refers to the way citizens and public officials should explain, defend, and promote their political views: by employing reasons that are accessible to all reasonable fellow citizens and that do not rely upon any particular worldview, whether religious or secular (Rawls 1996, 212-54). Rawls’s proposal is subjected to stringent examination in *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism*. Except for Robert Audi and Martha Nussbaum (and Weithman, who as editor takes no stance), the contributors to this volume criticize the ideal of public reason and, more generally, find that LRR’s social ideals of well-ordered civility and mutual respect are not as valuable as proponents suppose.

The Virtues of the Liberal Citizen

Despite the appeal of LRR’s social ideals, three charges can be leveled against this version of liberalism: it is unfair to (at least some) religious citizens, it is undemocratic, and it removes valuable resources from public deliberation. *Religion in the Public Square* subjects this version of liberalism to defense and scrutiny. The respectful and constructive dialogue between Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff centers on the virtues of a liberal citizen: should a good liberal citizen appeal to his or her religious beliefs when making a political argument? (The dialogue takes this form: each author presents an essay on the central question, each makes a substantial rejoinder to the other, and Audi concludes with a final statement summarizing the state of their debate and offering questions for further investigation.) Audi says that a citizen may make such an appeal—legality is not the issue here—but should not. His reasoning is similar to Rawls’s on behalf of public reason. Liberalism stresses liberty, so the problem of coercion looms large. It is not fair to subject your fellow citizens to coercive policies, such as taxation and policing, for reasons they cannot understand or potentially agree to. By using religious reasons in political argument, a citizen is suggesting that the government should take the action in question for a religious reason. If the government allowed that religious reason to inform its decision, citizens who do not share the reasoning would feel alienated, if not oppressed. Thus, citizens and officials have a moral duty to *find* and use secular reasons whenever possible—reasons whose force does not depend on God, theological doctrines, or religious authorities. Audi encapsulates the argument in two principles. The *principle of secular rationale* “says that one has a prima facie obligation not to advocate or support any law or public policy that restricts human conduct, unless one has, and is willing to offer, adequate secular reason for this advocacy or support” (25). The *principle of secular motivation* says that one has the same obligation to abstain from advocacy unless one is sufficiently motivated by a secular reason.

One obvious objection from the standpoint of religious faith is that these principles appear to require religious citizens, as Stephen Carter puts it, “to split their public and private selves” when they enter the public forum and “to remake themselves before they are allowed to press policy arguments” (1993, 8, 56). Audi says that although religious and civic motives are distinct, we should expect them often to cooperate. He expresses this expectation in the *principle of theo-ethical equilibrium*: “where religious considerations appropriately bear on matters of public morality or of political choice, religious people have a prima facie obligation—at least insofar as they have civic virtue—to seek an equilibrium between those considerations and relevant secular standards of ethics and political responsibility” (37). Now this may appear to place another burden on the religious citizen, but Audi thinks that Western monotheists will find a great deal of coherence between their religious ethics and secular ethics. Both a person’s secular and religious reasons will be tested and improved by the search for equilibrium. If religious believers are encouraged to seek out this equilibrium, they will tend to become virtuous citizens who can find both religious and adequately secular reasons for their political judgments. Thus not only do these principles help to secure a political consensus on laws and principles of justice, but they also provide religious citizens with an appropriate way to move from their religious reasons to secular political ones without having to bracket their deeply held beliefs.

Wolterstorff disagrees with Audi’s central contentions, arguing that the liberal position is unacceptable in any version. His critique is made largely on epistemological grounds. The liberal position holds that “the appropriate source of the factual and moral convictions on the basis of which determinations about justice are to be made ... is independent of any and all of the religious perspectives to be found in society” (73). This “independent source” must be such that it is fair to ask all citizens to base their political judgments upon it. Religious principles must not come into play at all, unless they happen to be yielded by the independent source. Otherwise, when it comes to political debates and decisions, citizens “are to allow their religious convictions to idle” (73). Wolterstorff examines the independent sources proposed by John Locke, Rawls, and Audi. All of them, he believes, are epistemically flawed: Locke failed to realize the science of morality he hoped for; Rawls fails to achieve the nontheoretical concept of justice he promises; and Audi’s principles require citizens to construct onerous and unnecessary philosophical reasons for their political positions. Wolterstorff finds all independent sources to be politically empty and unfair to those citizens whose religious convictions dictate that they ought to base their decisions concerning justice on their faith.

Moreover, the procedure of using an independent source greatly misreads what politics is all about. Rawls, Audi, and other proponents of LRR deeply hope for consensus and believe we can achieve it if we just temper our language and our thinking enough, if we just leave some of our differences at the door of the town hall. Wolterstorff finds it extraordinary that contemporary proponents of...
the liberal position are still looking for "the politics of a community with a shared perspective" (109). (It is indeed ironic that this aspiration emerges from those so attuned to the pluralism of modern societies.) The aspiration is perhaps a noble one—it is one form of the age-old quest for the common good—but Wolterstorff throws down the gauntlet: "I think that the attempt is hopeless and misguided. We must learn to live with a politics of multiple communities" (109). Wolterstorff sees no reason to upset the established political cultures of liberal democracies, where decisions are taken mostly by majority vote, with procedures in place to protect the rights of minorities.

This book is a model of clarity, careful thinking, and reasoned dialogue. It makes a valuable contribution to the religion and liberalism debate because the co-authors write with nuance and are willing to rethink and revise parts of their arguments. Despite their disagreements, the authors keep in view their shared aspiration for a just and good society that maximizes citizens' freedom and promotes social justice. On three core ideas of liberal democracy they agree or more or less agree: equal freedom, equal protection, and equal voice. They disagree on whether the core idea of neutrality is to be interpreted as the state's separation from all religious institutions (implying that the state should avoid actions that in any way benefit religion and religious groups) or its impartiality among religions (which would allow actions that benefit religions on a nonpartisan basis). Likewise, they disagree on whether civic virtue requires citizens to reach for secular reasons and motivations.

Audi should be praised because he parts company with the typical proponents of LRR by engaging in careful analysis of Western religion's coherence with the liberal tradition and by acknowledging the beneficial contributions of religious citizens to liberal societies. He avoids caricaturing religion as inherently divisive and oppressive. Yet to my mind, Wolterstorff has the better of the debate. In particular, his argument that liberals are uneasy with majoritarian democratic institutions is a brilliant turn that has sent proponents of LRR backpedaling, as seen in Audi's strained rejoinders (137-38, 168-69) and Rawls's emendations to his ideal of public reason. Wolterstorff's argument points to the larger question of what it means for a liberal society to have a common good. Liberals need to make their own thoughts on this matter clearer, but perhaps they should not give up the game too quickly. Even if there should be (virtually) no restraints on religious speech in a liberal society, does the liberal position have important cautions to raise about using religious reasons to justify laws and public policies?

Problems of Law and Policy

The most contentious issues in the religion and liberalism debate fall into the domain of law and policy. How should the state take notice, if at all, of the religious beliefs of its citizens? May a government or any of its officials employ religious reasons for their actions? May a government hinder or promote any religious activities? These questions are treated by a number of the authors under review. (For a discussion of more works on law and religion, see Cockson 1999.) In the US, issues of constitutional interpretation come immediately to the fore. Ronald Thiemann's Religion in Public Life is a useful roadmap through the thickets. Thiemann is a Christian theologian who argues that liberal philosophy and Supreme Court adjudication since the late 1940s have wrongly tried to limit or exclude religion's valuable role in public life. The question should be, not how to keep religion out of politics and public life, but what religion should properly do in those spheres. Thiemann's guiding principles throughout are that religious citizens should be as free as possible to practice their faith, with all the public ramifications this entails, and that religious groups as civic associations have something valuable to contribute to democratic life.

Although not a constitutional scholar, Thiemann has a fairly good handle on the deliberations underlying the creation of the First Amendment. Thomas Jefferson's metaphor of "a wall of separation between church and State" became "common constitutional parlance" when cited by Justice Hugo Black in the Everson v. Board of Education decision of 1947 (42). Thiemann argues that behind Jefferson's and James Madison's wariness of public religion was Madison's belief that human nature tends to a self-interest that breeds factions. This theory of factions has not served the US well, according to Thieman, because it is too pessimistic about human nature and loses sight of the common good. Thiemann claims that the American founders relied so heavily on this concept that they left successive generations no guidance as to appropriate civic virtues. "Madison's position regarding the balance of powers only indicates how these [public] vices can be neutralized; it tells us nothing of how public virtue can be nurtured in the populace" (24). Likewise, the founders "are silent on the question of whether religion might function to foster the virtues requisite for the pursuit of justice and equality in the nation" (27). Thiemann's brief against the factional theory is well taken, but he strains credibility in arguing that such men as Madison, Jefferson, Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, and others had nothing to say about public virtue or religion's assistance in its promotion.

Thiemann thinks the Supreme Court has undermined the First Amendment over the last 50 years through rulings that give far more priority to the Establishment Clause ("Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion") than the Free Exercise Clause ("or prohibiting the free exercise thereof"). Criticizing each bloc of justices in their approaches to the religion clauses, he would have the Court rethink its doctrines, tossing out the metaphors of separation, neutrality, and accommodation and instead interpreting the two religion clauses as one unit founded on the "basic constitutional values of freedom, equality, and equal respect" (166). Thiemann does not detail an approach beyond stating basic principles, nor does he explain how they should be used in adjudication. He does give some brief examples of what their use would yield in Establishment cases, where, it seems to me, he ends up taking essentially the liberal bloc's line—the one exception is that he would allow "moments of silence" in the public schools. An item that could test whether Thiemann's approach has anything new to offer is government aid to religious schools. Of this he states only, "Governments should be permitted to provide parochial schools with the same type of aid offered to nonreligious private schools, as long as such aid does not directly contribute to the advancement of the religious subject matter taught in the school" (167-68). It is not clear what Thiemann's permission of equal assistance implies for the controversial and growing practice of state-sponsored school voucher plans, because his qualification is ambiguous. Thiemann should clarify the matter and answer several questions: Is the free exercise of religion hampered if some families use tax monies to choose a religious private school rather than a public or nonreligious private one? If religious institutions should be considered equivalent to other voluntary associations, why should not government include them among the institutions that advance a public good such as education? If Thiemann is giving up the notion of new-
tuality as deleterious, then what is left to him but Wolterstorff's commendation of impartiality—an interpretation that Wolterstorff says obviously permits tuition vouchers for religious schools on an equal basis with other schools (115-16)?

Despite these criticisms, Thiemann's readable essay builds a cogent case that liberal philosophy and liberal democracies should be more open to the contributions of religion. He handily disposes of the myths that religious belief is inherently irrational and incompati- 
ble with democratic tolerance. His argument would be strengthened, however, by amplification and better illustration of his oft-made claim that religious groups make valuable contributions to democracy.

A well-developed and concrete case for Thiemann's claim would help quell the suspicions of some liberals that religion re-

main a divisive political force. A few essays in Religion and Con-
temporary Liberalism suggest such worries. Take that of Martha Nussbaum. She notices that the liberal commitment to liberty of conscience and a range of other rights occasions a dilemma in cases in which religions threaten basic rights, especially in non-Western countries. Liberals tend to hold back because cross-cultural judg-
ments seem to be an imposition of Western beliefs, hence violating the liberty of conscience of the religious majority of another country.

Nussbaum holds that liberalism should have no such qualms: when people's basic rights are violated—Nussbaum focuses her examples specifically on women—liberalism should vigorously con-

demn such practices whether they are based in religion or not. In making these judgments, she seems to take a basically Rawlsian ap-

proach to public reason, saying that religious discourse is appropri-

ate if it can be made publicly accessible and intelligible to citizens who do not share its presuppositions. Although some types of reli-

gious discourse and practice should be legally prohibited, others should merely be criticized as immoral and improper in the public sphere. The former approach is generally warranted when the basic rights of a person, especially in a negative form (rights against harm and hindrance), are fundamentally threatened.

Even though Nussbaum focuses on some of the negative manifesta-
tions of religious practice, it would be incorrect to say that she finds religion inherently oppressive or irrational; indeed, she specifi-
cally disavows such an attitude. Still, the way she frames the matter is telling. She works backward from examples of religion going too far and tries to determine where the boundaries should be drawn. This method, perhaps inadvertently, reinforces the impression that religion is seen as a problem by liberals. The method also casts the matter of religion's role in liberal society largely in terms of negative toleration: you should accept others' rights to think and say what they want as long as they do not harm anyone. She does not mention the positive side of toleration: the value of respectfully en-
gaging the thoughts of someone who thinks differently from you. She says too little, in my view, about the value of diverse ways of thinking, the inherent goods of a pluralist society, and the potential contributions that religions as particular moral traditions might con-

tribute to the progress of liberal democracy (related to this is her dis-

avowal of religion as a basic human good [1990]). On the other hand, Nussbaum notes that "religious discourse, if a villain in many of my examples, is also, in multiple and powerful ways, a major source of hope for women's future. We should therefore not accept any solution to the liberal dilemma that unduly marginalizes reli-
gious speech, or asks people to cut themselves off from humanitar-
iann motivations that may motivate them in a specifically religious form" (135). Certainly Nussbaum's concluding recommendations for interreligious dialogue, helpful practices, and citizen education would be strengthened if complemented by an exploration of religious groups' roles in such activities.

**Churches in the Public Realm**

Along those lines, some authors seek to focus our attention on what religious citizens and groups actually do: what they have done for the common good and what role religious belief plays in their politi-
cal action. The idea is to turn the investigation in a constructive di-
rection by asking what we can hope from religion rather than fear from it. John Coleman and David Hollenbach in the Weithman vol-

ume consider sociological data and theory, putting these in dialogue with their Christian-ethical perspectives (they particularly esteem the sociological studies of Casanova 1995; Putnam 1993 and 1995; and Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), Coleman draws on socio-

logical theory and interviews with members of six paradenominational groups that promote citizen activism or education. These avenues lead him to an account of civil society, which he considers an overly neglected topic in these debates. Civil society is the arena of "secondary" (or "voluntary" or "mediating") associa-
tions—groups that people join voluntarily and that occupy a middle place between the individual and the massive organizations of the state and the market. Among civil society's virtues is its role as "the seedbed for the moral life": through participation, we learn virtues and values that make social life possible and, indeed, richer (281). One such institution is obviously the church. Hollenbach argues that the decline in some forms of civic participation can be countered by citizens' vital participation in churches. Based on research showing that churchgoers develop higher levels of social skills than nonchurchgoers, Hollenbach proposes that "more church activism, not less, would seem called for if more active, more egalitarian repre-

sentation in democratic politics is judged desirable" (299).

I find these contributions useful to the debate because they go be-

yond theorizing about the ideal relationship between religion and liberalism to argue that liberal democracies in fact greatly benefit from the civic activities of religious citizens and groups. The claim prompts another question: should religious groups be thought of the same way as other secondary associations or do they bring some-

thing distinctive to the public square? To say that churches are at least as valuable as other secondary associations is important in it-

self, since often, as Thiemann argues, they are the one kind of insti-

tution regarded with suspicion as a result of the standard liberal inter-

pretation of church-state separation. But are churches essentially no different from any other association, as one might assume from reading Thiemann? Coleman and Hollenbach suggest that religious groups are carriers of spiritual meaning and moral values in ways superior to other groups. Religious believers are in their work "for the long haul," as one of Coleman's interviewees puts it (286); they are typically able to find more intrinsic value in their volunteerism and to rely upon their frameworks of meaning to sustain them through daily disappointments. Both authors also highlight the pro-

phetic role of religion: religious speech and action in the public square can transform politics by reorienting corrupted values and championing the dignity of neglected persons. Such transforma-
tions were seen in the faith-based abolitionism and civil rights move-

ments; Rawls's public reason is unable to account for such reorienta-
tions of the public's notion of justice (see Stiltner 1999, 58-65). In
sum, Coleman and Hollenbach propose that religions should be un-
derstood both as like other associations and as having distinctive
public value. Their arguments flesh out the convictions of such theologians as Thiemann that religion is valuable in public life and address the desire of such commentators as Nussbaum to see religion advance the cause of positive toleration and respect for human rights.

Public Theology

Normative religious thinkers will want to complement sociological arguments for the churches' positive contributions with a theological understanding of how church activities might be sustained and grounded. This is the province of what in Christianity has been called political theology or public theology. Its central question is how to understand the Christian church's relationship to the political society in which it abides. The question has been considered practically every Christian ethicist and significant theologian of modern times; it is a question that goes back to the beginning, but especially to Augustine. Augustine's distinction of the earthly and heavenly cities in The City of God has bequeathed public theology an enduring tension between two ends of a spectrum: should the church sharply separate the interests and the fortunes of the two cities, making little if any attempt to shape the political order, or should it seek close cooperation with the state to advance the causes of justice and the common good? Between the extremes of quietude and a self-effacing quest for "relevance," most Christian theologians and movements have staked out positions that try to acknowledge both the different ends of church and state and their shared interests in a just social order. Still, choices must be made. Today the attitudes of public theologians run the gamut from those very critical of contemporary liberalism to those who find significant overlap between Christianity and liberal thought.

One option, given the church's long, intertwined history with liberal democracy, is to present Christian theology as a contributor to public discernment. Duncan Forrester presents such a case in Christian Justice and Public Policy. His starting point is the perception that we are in a situation in which "nobody knows what justice is," but, unfortunately, too many people think they know (38-41). The proliferation of perspectives, especially the communication gap dividing conservatives and progressives that runs through all public debates, makes it difficult indeed for a pluralist society to guide its public policies toward justice. What can Christian public theology add to the cacophony?

Forrester thinks it would be wrong to answer "everything" or "nothing" (195-96). Christian public theology cannot provide top-down answers, but it does transmit "theological fragments" to the public forums of democratic societies. Given that Christian beliefs have shaped Western democracies through their history, it is to be expected that some fragments of the notion of Christian justice survive in secular theories of justice. Yet secular theories, such as those of Rawls, F. A. Hayek, and Jürgen Habermas, are inadequate as they stand. Christian justice presses beyond justice as fairness; the theological fragments that round out justice are love, community, and hope. The task of public theology is to draw out the implications of secular theories, make connections to these theological fragments, and provide a constructive voice and committed example in the public square. Forrester's public theology is laudably attuned to concrete social injustices and the realities of pluralism; unfortunately, the three blocks of the argument—a survey of policy debates over prisons and poverty in the UK, a theological critique of secular theories of justice, and an account of the theological fragments—are virtually freestanding, leaving the reader to speculate about the connections. His desire is to avoid a grand theory that will fail to deliver on its promises; rather, he lauds such theologians as Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth, who "simply by unselfconsciously doing as serious theology as they could often exercised considerable impact in the public realm" (36). Yet I suspect readers will wish that Forrester had indicated how Christian public theology can engage policy debates and influence their terms and results.

A more vigorous option is to incorporate liberalism under a Christian umbrella. In the Weithman volume, J. L. A. Garcia criticizes the turn that liberal theory took when it cut off its account of human rights from a substantive view of human sociality. Garcia commends Pope John Paul II's view of humans as inherently interpersonal creatures in need of God's guidance. He then goes further than any other contributor to the Notre Dame conference in suggesting that a religious consensus around this understanding of the human person could serve as the foundation of political life in the US: "For all Rawls' emphasis on the plurality of comprehensive doctrines in our society, the great majority of people hold religious beliefs within the Jewish and Christian traditions. There is, therefore, considerable unity within the diversity. Might not reliance upon this underlying agreement, a passive and latent consensus in contrast to the constructed and explicit one Rawls imagines, achieve a broad and lasting base of support for a widely shared conception of justice based on a human dignity that is rooted in our status as image of God?" (248). Does Garcia mean for this religious vision of freedom to serve as a consensus for social morality in the realm of civil society or as the foundation of laws and policies in the realm of the state? Garcia suggests the more robust answer when he rhetorically asks, "How specifically would a society's following my suggestion that the state employ a religiously informed picture of human freedom violate [civic friendship]?" (249).

No more than this is said about the state, but Garcia opens a can of worms here by appealing to a specifically religious conception of human nature and the world as a legitimate basis for governance. Liberals who use an independent source argue that no such doctrine should undergird a liberal political order. Their strategy may be discriminatory or self-defeating, as Wolterstorff, Garcia, and others argue, but how then are we to understand the foundation of justice and the common good in a liberal society? In Garcia's invocation of a Christianized political culture, we have an answer in the tradition of Thomas Aquinas, who saw much more overlap between the goals of church and state than Augustine did. Yet this answer strains our ability to recognize the account as liberal in any meaningful sense. Note, though, that Garcia's is only one of many possible ways to follow out Aquinas's ideas; some Thomists will focus more on natural law as the foundation of a cross-cultural account of justice and human rights, while others will blend in to their Thomism a significant dose of Augustine's realism.

Robert Song follows the latter strategy in Christianity and Liberal Society. His reasons for engaging liberal theory and practice are similar to Forrester's, as is his conviction that Christian faith and action make invaluable contributions to public life. Song builds his essay around three theologians who critically appropriated liberalism in the twentieth century—Reinhold Niebuhr, George Grant, and Jacques Maritain. These theologians show "the limits and dangers of liberalism from a theological point of view". Niebuhr deflated liberalism's progressive, utopian philosophy of history and Grant's account of the dynamics of technology "pointed up the potential instability of liberalism and the real possibility of historical
decline" (214). By promoting a "new Christendom" and a "democratic charter" of basic human rights, Maritain sought to rescue the moral goods of liberalism from its false commitment to neutrality. Song commends the direction of Maritain's arguments but proposes that his thought, which reflects Aquinas's positive attitude toward government, would benefit from being placed in a framework marked by Augustine's realism.

Forrester, Garcia, and Song think the church's attitude toward society, liberal or otherwise, should be one of critical and constructive engagement. Taking a cue from Karl Barth, Song says the church must say both "no" and "yes" to liberalism (226). The other two would affirm this advice in different degrees. Garcia's "no" to contemporary liberalism is strident, while his "yes" is conditioned on liberalism being transformed by Christian culture. Forrester speaks a "no" to liberal theories of justice in the sense that they are incomplete; his "yes" is to their rudimentary insights that must be completed by Christian justice. Song's view of what liberalism lacks is as trenchant as Garcia's: "Transcendence is unavoidable: either it will be offered through the religion or religions of the society, or it is liable to be established by the demonic absolutization of the liberal state" (220). Yet Song's Augustinian approach is wary of directly infusing Christian faith into public culture, let alone public policy. "In its disabused view of public rationality and its refusal to regard pluralist political forms as regrettable lapses from the norm, Augustinian thought can recognize the dangers of Christianity imposed from above, whilst also allowing that there may be genuine benefits for justice from a Christian political inspiration" (215).

Perhaps the most difficult thing about doing public theology is moving from theory to practice. I criticized Thiemann for being unclear about Establishment Clause adjudication and Forrester for not connecting his theological fragments to the policy issues he surveys, but many authors do not even do as much as that. Some public theologians, taking a strong stance against the quest for relevance, lay out the practice of public theology almost solely in terms of church life—often leaving unanswered questions about the church's relation to liberal democracy. Those who find that their theology requires critical acceptance of a pluralist, liberal democracy have the task of connecting their theological claims to the public debate. Why should those who are not Christians listen? Either way, Augustine's dilemma remains: how much peace dare the church make with the political order?

Conclusion

Liberals' efforts to assess accurately and appreciate critically religion's role in a liberal democracy and the care taken by theologians to approach liberalism with nuance bode well for both liberal theory and public theology. Such efforts will promote needed learning, discussion, and debate across disciplines, as modeled by Religion and Contemporary Liberalism and Religion in the Public Square. The tone and results of these investigations will be guided by the participants' answer to this question: is religion a political force merely to be tolerated or one whose beneficial effects should be welcomed? One important perspective to emerge from these books is the understanding that liberals are not unconcerned with community. Indeed, in their quest for a political consensus around the meaning of justice, they echo the classic Aristotelian and Thomistic discourse of the common good. But can such a quest harmonize with the democratic objective of letting everyone have a say, especially when the powerful yet multiple voices of religious groups...
are thrown into the mix? In other words, what are the options for pursuing the common good in a liberal democracy?

Five options have been encountered in this review. One is the comprehensive liberal approach that locates the common good in a philosophical theory, such as John Rawls offered in his magnum opus, *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Although many liberals still abide by comprehensive theories, Rawls's own shift away from that type of approach has raised serious problems for it. A second option is found in Rawls's more recent work: a "political liberalism" that eschews a comprehensive philosophical grounding and tries to develop a "freestanding" concept of justice via the political culture and public reason (Rawls 1996). This strategy has suffered heavy attack at the hands of Wolterstorff and the contributors to *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism*; its prospects will depend on the validity of those criticisms and on liberals' responses to the challenges posed (see Weithman's suggestions, 33-37). Those responses could lead to a third option—a tempered version of political liberalism. Audi suggests this when he claims that his system is more inclusive of religious citizens than Rawls's (138). Thiennn affirms much of Rawls's thought but challenges him to take pluralism seriously by supporting religious communities on an equal basis with other groups (95-114). Religious thinkers begin to make their claim in this third category, and often they press toward a fourth, namely, a revised liberalism that incorporates communitarian elements. There are several ways to do this: for instance, by reviving the values and traditions of the early US (so Thiennn); by privileging a religious-cultural consensus (so Garcia); by developing theologies in which the church shares common interests with liberal society but also criticizes that society and models an alternate way of life (so Forrester and Song); or by using some version of natural law theory to demonstrate how diverse religious and secular traditions can share a commitment to human rights and free institutions (so Song in his treatment of Maritain; see also Hollenbach 1994, Pope 1996, and Stiltner 1999). Finally, some religious thinkers say we have to move further; they offer a chastened liberalism that does not worry excessively about the common good in the sense of a society-wide agreement but still hopes to progress toward social justice and the uplifting of the oppressed (so Wolterstorff).

The latter three options, different though they are from one another, share an interest in revising contemporary liberalism's occasional hostility and customary indifference to religion. The works reviewed here go a long way toward debunking the attitude that religion is irrelevant or harmful to liberal democracy and demonstrating that liberals can and should expand their politics to include religious speech. They lay out the parameters within which future debates can be carried out more constructively. If the dialogue is expanded to include more members of the academy and the public, as well as the voices of Judaism, Islam, and Asian religions, it could well lead to a better practice of liberal democracy, in which a pluralist society sees the robust religious commitments of its citizens and their institutions as a boon to the common good.