

Beyond Church and State: Democracy, Secularism, and Conversion

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Christology lectures, Plant notes the striking similarity in tone and language to Heidegger's *Being and Time*. In the course of his support for this thesis, Plant offers a helpful introduction to Heidegger's *magnum opus*. Given the technical language of *Being and Time*, this introduction remains itself a useful resource. Drawing specifically on Heidegger's images of thrownness and confrontation, Plant likens this language to the equally confrontational language of *Christology*.

Plant's *Taking Stock of Bonhoeffer* should find a home on many a bookshelf. Though not the sort of landmark text that redefines a field, it nevertheless contributes to an emerging generation of Bonhoeffer scholarship. Its method alone provides a template for creative engagement with a wide variety of unorthodox interlocutors. Though some chapters extend thematically beyond the interest of most readers, on the whole the book admirably places Bonhoeffer on the forefront of contemporary theological conversation. It excels as a source for individual essay reference, and thus would be ideal for use in a class context. Plant's gift for clarity and concision compounds this excellence. Bonhoeffer scholars for their part will appreciate it as the well-deserved fruit of Plant's decades-long engagement with Bonhoeffer. If there is a criticism to be made, it is simply that all but one of the essays has been published elsewhere, and thus the serious Bonhoeffer enthusiast will have most likely come across the essays before. This of course in no way compromises the overall value of the text; it remains an achievement worth consideration by potential Bonhoeffer students and long-suffering Bonhoeffer veterans alike.

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Beyond Church and State: Democracy, Secularism, and Conversion. By MATTHEW SCHERER. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2013. Pp. 240. \$90.00 (HB). ISBN: 978-1-10-702609-4.

Democracy and the separation of church and state (religion and government), echoed through several state constitutions, alluded to in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and mentioned through various religious declarations by religious leaders and their respective institutions, has been challenged by liberal and conservative theories. The challengers have questioned whether society at large has transitioned to a fully secular state, which neglects religion and its possible influence on government. Matthew Scherer's *Beyond Church and State* proposes an examination of the "separation," suggesting that the current status quo requires conversion. In short, the separation between religion and government is not as clear as the phrase might incline; rather, there are multiple layers of religion and politics that make up a society's structure. In order to delineate this "crystalline structure," Scherer relies on several philosophers and political theorists, ultimately conceding that these two aspects of society do not exist within an allegorical vacuum.

Scherer's well researched and compelling text offers a unique reading of Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions*, John Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*, the work of Henri Bergson, the influence of John Rawls, Stanley Cavell's collective works, and finally, Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, as he delineates the false divide between church and state. The result is a comprehensive examination and a well-developed analysis of political and religious transformation in the modern era. These classical and modern authors aid in the assertion that the modern notion of secularism as the defining term of this generation and hence the political-religious separation is not so simple.

Each chapter explores the influence the aforementioned authors have in relation to the question of separation, thereby allowing Scherer to offer an expository survey of each in order to supplant the notion of a clean separation. And, without explicitly critiquing religious institutions, policies, ideologies, or political parties, the text invites the reader to consider the influence of religion on politics and the need for conversion in the political system as a result. Subsequently, Scherer dispels the idea of a vibrant, prevalent secularism, or a society that exists void of any impactful religious influence dominating the political discourse today.

The book's contribution to the field offers first a personal analysis of conversion (in Augustine's narrative), and then it analyzes society's presumed toleration of religion and religious traditions (Locke's *Letter*), before moving to issues relating to globalization and transformation addressed in Bergson's *The Two Sources*. Scherer's strongest point is made through his critique of John Rawls. This detailed chapter (132–167) suggests that the late philosopher's work rises to the level and influence of a "saint," a term Scherer uses repeatedly to describe Rawls, his work, and his post-mortem impact on political theory. Noting Rawls' "provocative" rhetoric (158), Scherer goes on to reaffirm the philosopher's influence, writing

critiques of Rawls, in arguing that he displaces politics or otherwise denies its importance, glide over the immense and, to judge from the broad, sympathetic reception of his work, effective effort he makes to convert his readers: such critiques take his strong performance to be a weak description, denying the simple fact that for so many, Rawls was and is a saint. (158)

Though not a book dedicated to the analysis of Rawls's work, it is clear that Scherer appreciates the contribution Rawls had on political theology, while remaining humble and removed from the spotlight (132–133 and 160–161); hence, the use of "saint" as a term of endearment for the late philosopher.

Scherer's fifth chapter, "The Wish for a Better Life: Stanley Cavell's Critique of the Social Contract," delves deeper into the current issues that impact political discourse, namely, "globalization and neoliberalization" (169). Cavell's work, which scrutinizes a number of past theorists (e.g., Locke and Rawls), serves as a complement to the previous chapters. Scherer's reading of Cavell desires a revisioning, a conversion, or even a revolution of the existing secularism (169–171). Scherer's emphasis is of course on Cavell's notion of a new understanding of society and its social contract, often (and unfortunately) associated with violence. This appears to be especially true for those who are numb to the problems present societies have—a point addressed through Cavell's analysis of Marx. The role of conversion in this chapter is also highlighted by Scherer, who writes:


Cavell's writing hints at a process of conversion bound up with open-ended improvisation, through which one produces one's own individuality, negotiates the terms of one's social legibility, and assumes wider political responsibility and engagement informed by practices of criticism and dissent (173).


This final chapter's focus is Scherer's successful attempt to connect the ideas of individual narrative conversion, a generalized local and national reform of the social contract, an awareness of globalization and the need for justice, and a convoluted connection between religion and politics.

The conclusion introduces the reader to the possibility Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* offers, but it is ultimately reluctant to accept the definition(s) of secularism presented by Taylor. Most notably, Scherer addresses his concern of Taylor's exclusion of non-traditional religions, atheism, Islamic countries, and Africa as important voices in the debate on secularism. This is especially evident in Taylor's treatment of secularism and feminist scholars; addressing issues in Egypt, India, and other global locations, Scherer notes the shortcomings of Taylor's theory (228–229). Scherer remains hesitant to endorse Taylor in the same way he favored Rawls and Cavell in earlier chapters.

The comprehensive text is certainly intellectually engaging; however, it may require prerequisite readings of Augustine's *Confessions*, Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* and *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism*, and selections of Taylor's *A Secular Age*. Scherer's book may best be used in a course on political theology that engages these texts. Nevertheless, the text succeeds in examining conversion as an important task for democracy and its future (234).

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Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and an Ethic of Resistance. By REGGIE L. WILLIAMS. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press. 2014. Pp. 196. \$39.95. ISBN 978-1-60258-804-2 (hbk).

In a 1939 essay, Dietrich Bonhoeffer reflects on a stark divide in America: "The fact that today the 'black Christ' of a young Negro poet is pitted against the 'white Christ' reveals a destructive rift within the church of Jesus Christ." (DBWE 15:456–7).¹ The poet to whom he refers speaks from the Harlem Renaissance, an artistic movement that flourished in the 1920s and deeply impressed Bonhoeffer