

Christianity and Contemporary Politics

Luke Bretherton

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In Anknüpfung an sein früheres Werk über Gastfreundschaft setzt Luke Bretherton mit diesem Buch seine theologische Auseinandersetzung mit Kultur fort. Diesmal gilt seine Forschung dem Bereich der Politik. Anstatt der Frage nachzugehen, welche Bedeutung ihre Beziehung zu Staat und Wirtschaft für die Kirche hat, richtet sich das zentrale Augenmerk des Werkes darauf, welche Bedeutung für die Kirche ein aktives gemeinschaftliches Leben in Bezug zum Nationalstaat und zur kapitalistischen Wirtschaft einnimmt. Im Verlauf dieses hilfreichen Buches befasst sich Bretherton mit dem Anliegen eines glaubwürdigen christlichen Zeugnisses in Reaktion auf die Herrschaft von Christus, und dies unter wechselnden politischen Bedingungen in einem globalisierten westlichen Umfeld.

SUMMARY

Extending his earlier work on hospitality, this book continues Luke Bretherton's theological engagement with culture, this time moving the exploration into the realm of politics. Rather than answering what it means for the church to relate to the state and market, its central focus is what it means for the church to pursue a common life with others in relation to the nation-state and capitalist market. Throughout this helpful book, Bretherton explores issues of faithful Christian witness in response to Christ's lordship amidst changing political situations of globalised Western contexts.

RÉSUMÉ

Prolongeant son ouvrage sur l'hospitalité, Luke Bretherton poursuit son dialogue théologique avec la culture. Cette fois-ci il choisit d'explorer le domaine de la politique. Plutôt que de répondre à la question de savoir ce que cela veut dire pour l'Eglise d'entrer en relation avec l'Etat et le marché, il cherche avant tout de savoir ce que cela signifie pour l'Eglise de rechercher une vie commune avec les autres, dans l'environnement de l'état-nation et du marché capitaliste. Tout au long de ce livre très utile, Bretherton explore des questions relatives au témoignage chrétien fidèle à la seigneurie du Christ, alors que les circonstances politiques changent dans un monde occidental globalisé.

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Extending his previous work on hospitality (*Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness amid Moral Diversity* [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006]), this book continues Luke Bretherton's theological engagement with culture. Bretherton, Senior Lecturer in Theology and Politics and Convener of the Faith and Public Policy Forum at King's College London, moves his engagement into the realm of politics.

In this book Bretherton does not engage politics directly, neither wishing to construct a political agenda

for state nor church. While sympathising with a recent shift to theological politics, this book's subject is 'to discern ways in which, at a practical level, churches and individual Christians are responding faithfully to the questions about the limits of the state, the market, and the community' (2). Its central question does not answer what it means for the church to relate to the state and market, but 'what does it mean for the church qua church to negotiate a common life with various non-Christian others in relation to the state and the market' (17). It explores issues of faithful Christian witness for those seeking to 'improvise faithfully' in response to Christ's lordship in a variety of changing, postsecularist political contexts (15, 21).

Between the introduction and brilliant conclusion, the book's argumentation unfolds in four chapters richly laden with case studies. Chapter one argues that regardless of state incentives extended to the church, the church 'should be extremely wary about partnership given the current terms and conditions of cooperation on offer' (32). Potentially distracting issues include administrative accountability requirements and other routine tasks likely to cause the church to mimic the state's structure and practices. If not seriously checked, this may rob the church of its primary need to focus on spiritual goals.

Chapter two examines the church's mobilization at local community levels, continuing Bretherton's critique of the capitalist nation-state. A test case is Saul Alinsky whose creativity left a legacy of political *asceticism* (disciplined formation), educating and apprenticing people for friendship in public and common life (77). Accordingly, the church should identify and utilise common objects of love with strangers, maintaining missiology as central feature of ecclesiology (84, 86-87). Bretherton develops the concept of 'double listening' both to Scripture (hence, God) and one's neighbours. Listening becomes 'the constitutive political act' of the church, being 'the primary form of faithful witness to the Christ-event within political life' (99-101), carrying implications for neighbourliness and worship.

National matters are considered in chapter three, particularly the issue of refugees, or 'bare life'. Bretherton emphasises the importance of locating 'the status and need' of refugees and asylum seekers in order to make sense of the debate about how best to help (129). Against utilitarians and deontologists, Bretherton argues the need of 'a stable arena of law and order' as the primary, defining need of refugees, in turn providing stable arenas of law and order, rendering human flourishing as a possibility. After reviewing limits of humanitarian care, application of the Lord's Prayer is explored with its inherent dynamic worship able to cultivate humility, thus preparing believers to encounter refugees as neighbours (142-145). The church 'hallows' bare life by responding to it theologically, recognising it as gift, judgment and promise (145-152). A practical illustration of methodology used to honour bare life includes the example of the US Sanctuary movement, including both difficulties and

possibilities inherent to that kind of approach.

The fourth chapter considers possibilities for channelling consumerism unto political ends. In the globalised context, this includes things like Fair Trade with its reprioritisation of the 'social' and the 'place' dimensions (184-187). Living out the Christian witness, emphasising friendship, neighbourliness and hospitality in the context of everyday life is what Bretherton defines as 'ordinary politics', which is part of Christian witness and gospel proclamation in particular situations.

While the book's argument is beautifully established, some critical questions linger. Specifically, who shares personal responsibility in political frameworks, and what may and may not indicate criminal activity in Bretherton's view, e.g., in issues like that of refugees (ch. 3)? Is there also a place for corrective discipline in any circumstances? Is competition always rendered unjust, unpeaceable and unhealthy (221)? What place does Bretherton relegate to the reality of the church's suffering in the world? In carrying out the politics of hospitality, how might the church avoid false hopes of an over-realised eschatology? What also of opportunities for the gospel's (hence, church's) flourishing in politically desolate or corrupt situations, and how might these be accounted for in light of the gospel's eschatological hope?

These questions notwithstanding, this book's strengths abound. Exposing incoherent political systems with no teleological framework (134), Bretherton's account of politics coincides with the expectation of the transformation of the prevailing hegemony (191). He is fully familiar with early and contemporary Christian political engagement, and with situations in North America, the UK and wider European countries. This work should be a welcome textbook in any university course focused on thinking theologically about the church's responsibilities amidst the nation-state and capitalist market. Yet because of its well-written style, it should also serve laypeople, pastors and those in other disciplines. Bretherton is one of the most helpful voices engaging culture in a way that results in robust witness and faithful gospel proclamation. This book is enthusiastically recommended to all concerned with relevant Christian witness in ever changing Western political situations.

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Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics

Hilary Marlow

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SUMMARY

Hilary Marlow's book is a serious attempt to develop a theological response to current environmental concerns by using the lens of the Old Testament prophetic books Amos, Hosea and First Isaiah. The book, which is a reworking of the author's PhD dissertation, offers a review of Christian authorship on creation, careful exegetical insights that highlight the voice of the non-human creation and practical applications from someone uniquely suited to handle the topic. The heart of the book is not an argument about science, but about the relationship between God, man and the environment, and the responsibilities that arise from that interaction.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Hilary Marlow's Buch ist ein ernsthaftes Unterfangen, eine theologische Antwort auf gegenwärtige Fragen zu Umweltschutz zu formulieren, die sie durch die Brille der alttestamentlichen Propheten Amos, Hosea und (erster) Jesaja betrachtet. Das Werk stellt eine Neubearbeitung der doktrinalen Dissertation der Autorin dar und bietet einen Überblick über christliche Autoren zur Schöpfung. Es weist sorgfältige exegetische Einsichten auf, welche die Stimme der übrigen Schöpfung abgesehen vom Menschen hervorheben, und enthält praktische Anwendungsbeispiele von einer Person, die auf einzigartige Weise geeignet ist, das Thema zu bearbeiten. Das Herzstück des Buches liegt nicht in der Auseinandersetzung mit der Wissenschaft, sondern in der Beziehung zwischen Gott, Mensch und Umwelt sowie die Verantwortung, die sich aus diesem Zwischenspiel ergibt.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans ce livre reprenant sa thèse de doctorat, Hilary Marlow s'efforce d'apporter une réponse théologique aux préoccupations actuelles pour l'environnement à travers le prisme des livres des prophètes Amos, Osée et le premier Ésaïe. Elle présente les écrits d'auteurs chrétiens sur le sujet de la création, puis se livre à une étude exégétique perspicace qui donne à entendre la voix de la création et dégage avec de grandes compétences des applications pratiques. Le livre n'est pas essentiellement une discussion de théories scientifiques ; il traite avant tout de la relation entre Dieu, l'homme et l'environnement, et des responsabilités qui en découlent.

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Hilary Marlow's book is a serious attempt to develop a theological response to current environmental concerns by using the lens of the Old Testament prophetic books Amos, Hosea and First Isaiah. As expected, this work assumes the reality of climate change and the severe