

result is a beautifully composed introduction to one of the richest theological minds of our generation.

Short enough to be read in a single sitting, the volume is perhaps best read as a series of brief, lunch-break sized meditations. A prologue at the beginning and interlude in the middle of the chapters describe Williams' poetic grappling with the strangeness of Christ in three famous paintings: *Resurrection*, *Christ Pantocrator* and *Our Lady of Vladimir*. These serve not only to frame and embellish the chapters, but also to reinforce Myers' presentation of Williams as an apophatic and poetic theologian invested in teasing out the boundaries of language. This impulse is further intimated with a pithy line from one of Williams' poems introducing each chapter. Equally important for framing these chapters, Williams' theology is said to fall into three broad periods: an early period dominated by a Wittgensteinian question regarding language and sociality, a middle period dominated by a Hegelian question regarding social order, and a later period dominated by a Freudian question regarding human desire. These questions emerge roughly within the early, middle, and late chapters, thereby connecting the chapters to developments within Williams' thought.

In what way, then, does Williams' theology sketch not only Christ as a stranger, but, indeed, a faith that is characterised as strange? Among the numerous ways Myers elicits this theme in Williams' work are the following: Williams replaces the familiar Western autonomous self with an odd, vulnerable apophatic humanity (18); God is portrayed as working through the tragedy and the foolishness of the cross, not the familiar logic of natural law or objective norms (27); the resurrection is seen as a permanent disturbance, something distinct from normal history (30); the Church is characterised as born in trauma and existing in rupture and discontinuity (31); the light of Christ is depicted as making one a stranger to a flimsy, constructed self (32); the work of Christ is seen as estranging us from a fallen world (33); Christ appears on the cross not as someone familiar, but as a stranger who robs us of our standard use of language (34, 121); rather than supporting an uncritical repetition of formulae, orthodoxy brings out the strangeness of familiar Scripture and tradition (46); at every stage of the church's journey, the gospel is said to become 'stranger and more difficult' (49); saints are put forward as unbalanced individuals whose 'weirdness' demonstrates the strange world of God (77, 104); eschatology suggests something radically new, a future that is 'strange and unforeseen' (96); prayer is a 'stammering, hopelessly inefficient language' where we are saturated with meaning such that God's nearness makes God strange (101, 103); in confession we recognise our tendency to make ourselves strangely distorted (108); art is credited with opening up the strangeness of the world, thereby overthrowing our idolatrous fantasies (111); holiness is claimed to be recognising the 'strange objectivity' of God (112); Christ's presence in this

world involves a 'strange hiddenness' (113); and writing is not for assertion or comprehension, but put forward as a way to open oneself up to what is strange and unfamiliar (122).

As the above litany suggests, Myers tells the story of a theology that arrives at the same alterity and discontinuity as Karl Barth's, yet in a journey that works from the puzzles of ordinary human relationships up rather than from a Trinitarian logic down (6). However, in spite of these resonances, Myers is not interested in reconciling Williams with Barth; on the contrary, at one point he shows where Williams misreads Barth. Rather, the Williams Myers presents suggests a mind too original to be framed in light of any one theologian. Theologians such as Augustine, Sergius Bulgakov and Vladimir Lossky must play important roles in the discussion, as well as the influences of Dostoevsky, T.S. Eliot, Donald MacKinnon, Iris Murdoch and Gillian Rose.

Equally embellishing the volume and accenting the theme are Myers' introductory comments and occasional narrative smatterings of Williams' unconventional life. Born and raised in the off-beat town of Swansea, Wales, an illness prevented a normal childhood. At Cambridge he was drawn to an overlooked, unusual mentor (Donald MacKinnon) and chose to study the unconventional theology of Russian Orthodoxy. In debates within the Anglican Communion, Williams strives to rethink matters, offering unusual, controversial stances. Behind all of this, Myers detects the development of a poetic methodology in Williams – a habit of examining things until what was familiar becomes strange (xiii, 2). Even the picture on the cover of the book plays into this biographical theme, presenting a curiously bearded cleric with overgrown eyebrows and a rather large wooden cross around his neck.

Although not all will be in agreement with the various elements of Williams' theology (this reviewer was not), undoubtedly readers will be delighted by this graceful and clear portrait of one of the most significant contemporary theologians.

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### *Religion and the Public Order of the European Union*

Ronan McCrea

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#### SUMMARY

This book explores the nature of the relationship between religion and politics in the various member states of the European Union. Ronan McCrea provides thoughtful and helpful answers to the questions provoked by this topic. Recognising that a variety of different approaches exists within the European Union – from the established



Churches of Greece and Denmark on the one hand to the aggressive secularism of France on the other –, McCrea highlights that two traditions play prominent roles in the relationship of religion and politics in EU countries: secularism, and a set of historic European Christian traditions. McCrea supports the equal treatment of religions within the EU but opposes strict secularism on the grounds that religion, Christianity included, has contributed profoundly to European cultural identity.

#### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das vorliegende Buch erforscht das Wesen der Beziehung zwischen Religion und Politik in den verschiedenen Mitgliedsstaaten der Europäischen Union. Ronan McCrea bietet wohlüberlegte und hilfreiche Antworten auf die durch dieses Thema aufgeworfenen Fragen. Er weiß wohl, dass es viele unterschiedliche Ansätze innerhalb der Europäischen Union gibt – von den etablierten Kirchen in Griechenland und Dänemark bis hin zu einem aggressiven Säkularismus in Frankreich. Der Autor betont, dass zwei Traditionen eine herausragende Rolle in der Beziehung zwischen Religion und Politik in den Ländern der EU spielen: zum einen Säkularismus und zum anderen eine Reihe historischer christlicher Traditionen in Europa. Er unterstützt die Gleichbehandlung der in der EU vertretenen Religionen, lehnt aber einen strikten Säkularismus mit dem Argument ab, dass Religion – das Christentum eingeschlossen – einen weitreichenden Beitrag zur europäischen kulturellen Identität geleistet hat.

#### RÉSUMÉ

Ce livre a pour but d'explorer la nature de la relation entre la religion et la politique dans les divers États membres de l'Union Européenne et apporte des réponses bien réfléchies et pertinentes aux questions que ce sujet suscite. McCrea prend en compte la diversité qui existe à cet égard dans l'Union Européenne, de la Grèce ou le Danemark dont l'Eglise est liée à l'État d'un côté, à la France caractérisée par une sécularisation agressive d'un autre. Il montre que deux traditions jouent un rôle prééminent dans les pays de l'Union Européenne : celle de la sécularisation et un ensemble hérité des traditions de l'Europe chrétienne historique. Il se fait l'avocat d'un traitement égalitaire des religions au sein de l'Union, mais s'oppose à un esprit de sécularisation strict en faisant valoir que la religion, christianisme compris, a profondément contribué à l'identité culturelle européenne.

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*Religion and the Public Order of the European Union* is an interesting account of the relationship between religion and politics in the countries of the European Union and in the European Union in general. Avoiding undifferentiated generalisations, Ronan McCrea gives a thoughtful answer to a complex question. Among the 27 member states of the European Union there is no consensus regarding the best arrangement between church and State. Some countries have State Churches, such as the Lutheran Church in Denmark and the Greek

Orthodox Church in Greece. Some other countries have a pluralistic model. The Netherlands do not have a State Church, but religious schools have the same rights as state schools and receive a considerable level of state funding. Finally, there are also countries with a state policy of strict secularism. In France there is no attachment of religion to public institutions; headscarves, for example, are banned from French schools.

According to McCrea, two traditions are influential in the current policy of the European Union towards religion. On the one hand there is the secularist tradition. Thanks to the rise of humanism, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and secularisation, Europe is the most secularised continent. On the other hand, Europe's Christian tradition is still influential. Although Christianity has lost its hegemonic position in Europe due to secularisation, many EU member states maintain their Christian traditions. Christianity has a continuing role in the national identity of some countries: think of the State Churches but also of the national flags of some countries, which contain symbols linked to the crucifix. Furthermore, the Roman Catholic Church has not given up its political ambitions, especially when the so-called 'life-world' questions (such as euthanasia, abortion and homosexuality) are discussed. Finally, religion has much influence on national educational systems and on healthcare provision.

McCrea pays much attention to the polarised discussion about the preamble to the European constitution in 2003. The first draft of this preamble contained no reference to either God or Christianity as a source of Europe's cultural heritage, only to religious inheritance in general, although the civilisations of Greece and Rome and the Enlightenment were explicitly mentioned. Some countries and religious organisations were therefore very critical about this first draft. In the final version the references to Greece, Rome and the Enlightenment were deleted. Conservative Christians and some staunch secularists were dissatisfied, the latter because the final draft still contains a reference to 'religious inheritance'.

McCrea makes interesting observations about the selective use of secularist arguments in some European legislation. Some legislators are very concerned about Islam and 'islamisation', and it seems that their secular law-making is aimed solely against the Muslim population. In 2006, the centre-right Dutch Balkenende Administration introduced an immigration test with accompanying video. The test requires immigrants to answer some questions about the Netherlands and also about Dutch norms. Immigrants are asked whether female circumcision and smacking women are acceptable practices, and how they would react if they would encounter a kissing gay couple. Furthermore, the instructional video shows footage of two men kissing and of female topless bathing. The claim that this immigration test is aimed at Muslims is strengthened by the fact that 'Western' immigrants (from the USA, Canada,



Australia and New Zealand) are exempt. Left-wing politicians and opinion leaders were, of course, very critical.

The Dutch approach influences other European countries: the German states of Baden-Württemberg and Hessen introduced similar immigration tests, both focusing on issues seen as particularly relevant to Muslims, such as a question about 9/11, Israel and the Holocaust. Left-wing politicians were critical of these tests; Volker Beck, a member of the Green Party, said that the Christian democratic interior minister of Baden-Württemberg himself would likely fail the test because of his anti-gay policy. Besides, the state government of Baden-Württemberg openly admitted that the targets of the new immigration policy were Muslims.

The European Union and its member states are less secular in their approach when Christianity is at stake, as became very clear in the case *Lautsi v Italy*. Initially, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the

obligatory display of crucifixes in Italian state schools violates the rights of non-religious parents. In 2011, however, this decision was overruled by the Court's Grand Chamber. The member states have the right to uphold their Christian traditions. Islam, as a foreign religion, apparently has fewer rights.

McCrea fundamentally supports equal treatment of the different religions. He therefore opposes law-making that discriminates against Islam and favours Christianity. On the other hand, he also opposes staunch secularism because religion (including Christianity) has contributed to the cultural identity of Europe. His approach is very thoughtful and his study should be recommended to everyone with interest in questions about Church-State issues.

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