

Reviews

The American Myth of Religious Freedom

Kenneth R. Craycraft, Jr.

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One of the more striking characteristics of Christianity is the remarkable resilience and flexibility it displays in times of societal upheaval and fundamental political change. Beginning with its emergence in the Roman Empire, organized Christianity has not only survived but, to greater and lesser degrees, even flourished under an extraordinarily wide range of political regimes. To cite only a few examples, the Christian religion has managed to accommodate itself to such diverse socio-political arrangements as the Roman Empire, medieval feudalism, the Holy Roman Empire, the Italian city-states, absolute monarchies, liberal democracies, and, if only on the level of basic survival, the atheistic Communist states.

Christianity's ability to thrive under the socio-political arrangements of such fundamentally different regimes is due, in large part, to its inherently *doctrinal* nature. As a revealed religion, Christianity is less concerned with delineating a detailed moral-political code than it is with announcing the Good News of the Kingdom of Heaven. To be sure, the Christian religion promulgates a law that includes substantive moral teaching. But the goal of this law is the possession of eternal blessedness, not the juridical establishment of a specific socio-political program. In this respect, Christianity stands in sharp contrast to Judaism and Islam, the other two revealed religions of the West. Strict adherence to divine law characterizes orthodox Jewish and Muslim belief, whereas understanding Christianity as a transpolitical "sound doctrine"¹ is significant for Christians. The community of Christian believers is bound together not by a comprehensive legal and social system, but rather, by shared beliefs in a set of revealed doctrines. Justification within Christianity does not depend so much on the

obligatory performance of legally sanctioned deeds, but on the purity and steadfastness of a person's faith.

Christianity's early intellectual caretakers understood that Scripture needed further theological refinement because of the Gospel's emphasis on the salvific role of faith. Since human beings are judged by the purity of their faith, the Church Fathers recognized that divine revelation must be rendered as accurately and lucidly as possible. Viewed from this perspective, therefore, Christianity's failure to provide either its own paradigm for the correct ordering of society or the endorsement of any existing set of arrangements is directly related to its transpolitical nature.

Recently, however, a number of Christian thinkers have questioned the legitimacy of the modern liberal regime. Liberal democracy has been increasingly criticized not only for failing to support, but for eroding the intellectual foundation of the Christian faith. This argument is forcefully advanced in Kenneth R. Craycraft's engaging, and occasionally, jarring new book *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*.² A former professor of theology at Saint Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas, who is presently enrolled in the Law School at Duke University, Craycraft "sets out" to deconstruct "the idea" of religious freedom to expose its "radically secular" roots.

It should be clear from the preceding remarks that Craycraft's argument in *The American Myth of Religious Freedom* lies outside the familiar parameters of mainstream religious and political thought. While the book's title suggests that the American understanding of religious freedom is the principal topic, the author insists that his main concern has to do with liberalism and not with America or the "liberal American idea" of religious freedom. In other words, Craycraft's book challenges the reader to consider the kind of untimely religious critique of liberalism that characterized the discourse of the Catholic Church throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The "Irreligion" of Religious Freedom

The American Myth of Religious Freedom begins by discussing the pervasiveness of "belief" in the idea of religious freedom in current political discourse. Using the language of postmodern literary theory, Craycraft repeatedly refers to the idea of religious liberty as a "myth." He thinks the force this "powerful formative myth" has exerted on the American psyche cannot be exaggerated. On the one hand, "the myth" of religious freedom originally served a "creative purpose" in the American regime. By articulating "a set of symbols, rites, institutions, and stories that ... reflect how [the American people would] see the world," it provided them with "a common story." On the other hand, the power

of this myth *remains* formative inasmuch as it continues to “create” the “mindset ... and prejudices” of future generations of Americans. The American myth of religious freedom paradoxically perpetuates itself and the regime it helped found.³ According to Craycraft, the myth is so strong that even those who claim the American regime was founded on Christian principles typically cling to an “unquestioned belief” in the principle of religious liberty. Insofar as conservative-minded Americans think of themselves as Americans, they implicitly and inescapably “testify” to the truth of this myth.

Craycraft’s analysis of the pervasiveness of belief in religious liberty is mostly correct. Yet, as we shall see, his postmodern reduction of “the idea” of religious freedom to myth does not do justice to its partial truth, because the literary method he employs reduces the idea of religious liberty to mere ideology. His approach is methodologically incapable of entertaining the possibility that there may be a deliberate reason for the political idea of religious liberty.

Be that as it may, for Craycraft, the problem with the myth of religious freedom, when followed to its logical conclusion, is that it “undermines ... belief in Christianity defined in any interesting way.”⁴ Craycraft is more keenly aware of the theoretical problem the liberal understanding of religious freedom poses to Christianity than the vast majority of contemporary Christian theologians and political scientists. Rather than simply accepting religious freedom as an unqualified good for religion, Craycraft has taken the time to think through the arguments. Not only is he aware of the original intention behind the idea, he also sees the implications arising from it.

The “liberal theory of religious freedom” institutionalizes the practice of religious liberty by raising it to the level of a universal principle. Consequently, the theory is first presented as a good for both the political order and religion. The theory has the obvious, salutary effect of curbing the threat of political persecution. Given the bloodied history of religious strife characteristic of early post-Reformation Europe, it is understandable why public-spirited political thinkers sought to find an arrangement that would lessen the likelihood of such explosive conflict. Furthermore, the theory of religious liberty seems to benefit religious practice. Adhering to the religion of one’s own choosing represents a deeper commitment to one’s faith. Thus, on the surface, the type of religion practiced under the principle of religious freedom is likely to be more pure, if only because it reflects “the authentically free” choice of the “unencumbered self.”⁵

As Craycraft explains over several chapters, behind the theory’s salutary interest in the health of religious practice lies an implicit, willful rejection of the truth of religion in general and of any, one religion in particular. While not

saying so directly, Craycraft draws upon the groundbreaking work of twentieth-century political philosopher Leo Strauss in retracing how John Locke, the chief architect of the theory of religious liberty, sought to remove religion from the public sphere by relegating it to the private realm of personal belief. Craycraft insists that, for Locke, the place of religion in society “is the *first* problem of political theory and practice.”⁶ (Craycraft’s ahistorical genealogy, however, fails to acknowledge *any* legitimate historical or political basis for this concern in the early modern period. He claims that the motivation behind the theory had “nothing to do with social or historical expediency and everything to do with a particular moral, religious, and political theory.”⁷) In contrast to mainstream political theorists who view the *Two Treatises of Government* as Locke’s most influential work, Craycraft regards his *Letter Concerning Toleration* to be the “most important contribution to . . . modern political theory.”⁸

In the *Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke separates moral and religious principles from the state of nature argument that the modern state would use to “privatize religious belief.” Building on Hobbesian anthropology, which grounds political life on a pre-moral fact, namely, humanity’s fear of a violent death, Locke identified the desire for “comfortable self-preservation” as the true ground of civil society. From this pre-moral fact Locke derived the conclusion “that religion is something one chooses from a position of moral, social, and religious autonomy.”⁹ According to Craycraft, the reason that Locke’s theory could require religious belief to be privatized—i.e., that religious belief has no explicit role to play in public life—was because of his open indifference to the various truth claims separating religions. The motivating force of “liberalism’s Lockean theory of religious liberty” is neither philosophical nor theological but overtly political. Locke’s principal aim was to secure peaceful coexistence among religions by granting them the same degree of freedom and political status, thus “relativizing” their doctrinal particularities. In Craycraft’s estimation, by securing this political arrangement liberalism proudly and falsely claims to have solved the theoretically irresolvable “theologico-political problem.”¹⁰ Far from having the best interests in mind for religion, Locke’s principle of religious toleration presented the liberal state with a time-bomb designed to “privatize and marginalize orthodox” religious belief.¹¹

Liberalism’s theory of religious freedom is thus a wolf in sheep’s clothing. It feigns concern for the well-being of religious belief but employs a fictive anthropology to liberate humanity from what it sees as the death grip of religious belief. Craycraft makes this argument in the book’s final chapter, “There’s No Such Thing As Religious Freedom, and It’s No Big Deal.” As the chapter title suggests, Craycraft follows the lead of postmodern literary theorist Stanley Fish.

What he successfully brings to light, however, is the typically overlooked fact that the theory of religious freedom is only a part, albeit an important one, of the larger “project of liberalism.” Indeed, despite the suggestive title of the book, the true target of Craycraft’s ire is not directed toward the American idea of religious freedom or even the practice of religious liberty, but to liberalism itself. He objects to the claim that liberalism has “found a set of objective, neutral principles, by which objective universal judgments can be made.”¹²

The real strength of his critique rests on the undeveloped recognition that the liberal regime poses a new type of challenge to the integrity of Christianity. Craycraft understands that American liberal democracy is a new experiment, and not merely a variation of the ancient republican model. In fact, for all practical purposes, modern liberal democracy is incapable of being understood simply within the framework of the regimes traditionally articulated by Aristotelian political science.¹³ Because liberal democracy raises the principle of consent to the level of *the* single legitimizing principle of human life, it breaks with the sempiternal natural cycle of regimes set forth in Aristotle’s *Politics*. Compared to modern liberal democracy, Periclean Athens and republican Rome were both aristocratic regimes. As Alexis de Tocqueville observed, the pre-democratic and democratic worlds differ “almost in kind.” Consequently, the types of men that each world tends to produce “are like two distinct orders of human beings, each of which has its own merits and defects, its own advantages and its own evils.”¹⁴

In Craycraft’s view, the truth of the liberal regime’s relation to religion is that it seeks to establish “irreligion as the official state-endorse[d] religious opinion.”¹⁵ The liberal regime’s emphasis on consent has the effect of calling into question not only the transpolitical claim of Christianity, but also the very ground on which this claim is made. In an unsubtle and heavy-handed chapter titled “From Theory to Practice: Madison and Jefferson,” Craycraft argues that the “great task” of establishing irreligion as the official American state religion was taken up by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Through a process of “literary genealogy,” he endeavors to show how these two great Lockean practitioners enshrined anti-religious doctrine in the First Amendment. Craycraft paints here with extremely broad and often misleading strokes; he unfairly reduces both Jefferson and Madison to Locke, thus overestimating Locke’s influence on the American Founding. In making his case against the liberal theory of religious liberty, Craycraft refuses to be deterred by such stubborn facts as Jefferson’s description of the *Declaration of Independence* “as an expression of the American mind” and not just of his own thought. Likewise, he is unwilling to admit that while Madison’s account of liberty and conscience

in the *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments* is not wholly Christian, it is at least partially indebted to the Christian understanding of these things.¹⁶

Craycraft's exaggerated account of Locke's influence on the American Founding explains why he views the Supreme Court's decision in *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947) on the separation of church and state to be an accurate reflection of the Framers' position. Religious conservatives who think the Court's decision woefully distorted the Framers' argument on church-state relations err, in Craycraft's judgment, by identifying the religious sentiment of the general population at the Founding with the stance of the Founders themselves:

Now it is probably unarguable that the broadly popular sentiment at the time of the American Founding was that the state ought to protect religious freedom ... but to claim that the intention of the Constitution of the United States is to protect religion from the state rather than the state from religion is simple legal and historical fiction.¹⁷

Against the vacuity of the liberal theory of religious freedom, Craycraft upholds the "authentic grounds of religious freedom" articulated in the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Religious Liberty*. Like the liberal myth of religious freedom the Council's *Declaration* also attempts to establish "a full range of religious freedom" for all persons. The *Declaration* does this by carving out a particular kind of freedom for the Roman Catholic Church, one grounded in its "distinct right" as a repository of religious and moral truth. As a unique repository of Christ's revelation, the Church's freedom supercedes the freedom possessed by the non-Christian.

Craycraft is correct in singling out the fact that the *Declaration* provides the principle of religious liberty with a truer, more solid foundation than its impoverished Lockean counterpart. However, it must be acknowledged that Craycraft succumbs to a rather simplistic interpretation of American religious history. After reading Craycraft's account of this history, one could get the false impression that the American Revolution was explicitly and unapologetically atheistic. In contrast to the vitriolic anti-religious spirit of the French Revolution, the American Revolution demonstrated a greater openness to and respect for religion. Furthermore, while the heterodox nature of Madison's and Jefferson's religious beliefs has been recognized for some time now, Craycraft implies that the rest of the Founding Fathers had similar beliefs. He ignores the fact that while the Founding Fathers may not have been "orthodox Christians" (an ambiguous phrase he appears to identify with Catholics), the majority were Christians of various institutional affiliations. Craycraft's argument cannot account for the role played in the Founding by mainline Protestants

such as James Wilson, or Unitarians who believed in a Providential, Creator God. He refuses to acknowledge that many of the Founders did not worship at the altar of modern rationalist philosophy.

Craycraft's reduction of American religious history to the effects of Madison's and Jefferson's Lockeanism is seriously misguided. The history of religion in America is actually far more complex. Craycraft's tendency is to overstate the degree to which political life, even modern political life, can be understood as the application of theory to practice. Consequently, he never takes seriously the possibility that the American Founders may have arrived at a prudential solution to the problem of religious belief. A more accurate appraisal would acknowledge that America's lived history of religion is richer than the regime's partially Lockean theory. In short, Craycraft fails to realize that the American regime's *prudential* accommodation of religious belief defies any purely theoretical account.

He entertains, but finally rejects, this prudential alternative in a provocative chapter titled "Catholic Irony? John Courtney Murray on Religious Freedom." Taking his cue from Peter Augustine Lawler's reading of *We Hold These Truths*, Craycraft offers a similar, and in some sense derivative, reading of Murray's famous book.¹⁸ His purpose is to show the "irony" of Murray's famed "reconciliation" between the moral and religious demands of Christianity, on the one hand, and the principles of American democracy, on the other. Craycraft believes the interpretive key of *We Hold These Truths* to be revealed in Murray's remark that

the question is sometimes raised, whether Catholicism is compatible with American democracy. The question is invalid as well as impertinent; for the matter of its position inverts the order of values. It must, of course, be turned around to read, whether American democracy is compatible with Catholicism.¹⁹

Contrary to popular opinion, Craycraft argues convincingly that Murray was aware of the non-Christian, and especially non-Catholic, elements in the American Founding. Whereas conventional wisdom views Murray as having accommodated Catholic teaching to the political principles set forth in the *Declaration of Independence*, Craycraft argues that precisely the opposite was true. Far from forging a synthesis between the two, or suggesting that Catholic thought could prudently elevate Jefferson's thought, Craycraft's Murray rejected America's constitutional understanding of religion. Thus, according to Craycraft, "Murray [was] not accepting the essential philosophy of Jefferson and improving it with a little Catholic theology." Rather, he offered "a distinctively Christian understanding of how a Christian can live in America."²⁰

Craycraft properly calls attention to the elegance and subtlety of Murray's argument in *We Hold These Truths*. But he errs in mistaking Murray's subtlety with "irony." Murray's argument is not fueled by an irony that delights in cloaking its rejection of American principles, but rather, by theoretical-practical sobriety that moderates the excesses of American democracy from within.²¹ According to Lawler, Murray's true genius consisted in his recognition that the American Founding could not claim theoretical coherence as a *political act*. Murray recognized that despite all efforts to the contrary, the moral, religious, and political principles articulated in the American Founding did not, and could not, form a theoretically coherent whole, which was why he thought Jefferson spoke of "the American mind" and not the "American philosophy." This also explains why Murray affirmed a tension in the Founding between "a voluntarist idea of law as will" and "a tradition of natural law as inheritance ... as an ... intellectualist idea."²² The problem of radical autonomy plaguing America today was thus "a possibility ... inherent from the beginning."²³ Yet Craycraft fails to appreciate that Murray has more in common with the sophisticated moderation of Edmund Burke than with the dilettantish irony of postmodernism.

What should be made of the fact that Murray chose to elevate America's liberal principles subtly, whereas Craycraft chose to shout his rejection of these principles from the rooftop? Does Murray's choice to moderate the American regime from *within* not say something profound about his understanding of the way Christians should relate to the regime in which they live? Conversely, does Craycraft's refusal to use the same kind of politically responsible rhetoric not suggest something entirely different?

This question hints at the real flaw in Craycraft's argument. The fundamental problem with this book is not the hyperbolic claim that Christians ought not accept "the principles of the American Founding,"²⁴ nor the odd suggestion that the "degeneration" of the "liberty of constitutionalism ... is not ... important to Christians."²⁵ Such remarks, no matter how politically irresponsible, are the products of Craycraft's remarkable belief that Christians have no genuine stake in political life, which is the book's fundamental flaw. Thus the absence of religious liberty is "no big deal" because citizenship is devoid of meaning for Christians.

For Craycraft, Christianity is not merely transpolitical but radically *apolitical*. Christians have "no real stake" in the political order. Nor, for that matter, do they have *any* interest in "changing it in any fundamental way."²⁶ Moreover, the Christian's only real "interest is ... to persuade people *to believe* by witnessing to the resurrection of Christ, who ... relativizes all political theories and

who commands that people bind themselves to no one.”²⁷ What is so startling about Craycraft’s statement is its resemblance to Epicurus’ atheistic doctrine. Like Epicureanism in general, Craycraft’s position does more than simply depreciate the importance of political life. It asserts that Christians have “no real stake” or “interest” in political life. For Christians, political concerns are solely negative because they often disturb the rhythm of their private religious lives. In effect, Craycraft consents to Rousseau’s description of the Christian citizen offered in the penultimate chapter of the *Social Contract*, namely, that they are citizens only in the most attenuated sense of the term.

Craycraft’s apolitical stance explains why he fails to articulate any positive political vision. Strictly speaking, his argument is neither genuinely conservative, since there is nothing in liberalism he wants to preserve, nor authentically reactionary, since he does not call for a return to an earlier form of clerical politics. It is rather entirely critical. What matters, for Craycraft, is only that Christians be allowed to live their lives as Christians.

By not addressing the question of citizenship, Craycraft paradoxically departs from the very tradition of Christian political reflection he wants to uphold. Because of its doctrinal nature, theologians have generally acknowledged that Christianity must accommodate itself to current political arrangements. Yet such an accommodation carries an implicit challenge: How can one account for Christian participation in political life if human beings are ultimately ordered to a good, transcending politics? Christianity has offered two basic responses to this question, seen in the thought of Saint Augustine of Hippo and Saint Thomas Aquinas. By offering a brief sketch of their positions, the distinctively *Christian* reasons for rejecting Craycraft’s call to apolitical withdrawal will be brought into sharper focus.

The Two Poles of Christian Citizenship

Christianity’s complicated relationship to political life became apparent as early as the second century. The anonymous *Letter to Diognetus*, for example, describes Christians as “aliens” for whom “every foreign land is their fatherland, and yet for them every fatherland is a foreign land since ... [their] true citizenship is in heaven.” Despite this fact, the *Letter* admonishes Christians to “live in their own countries ... have a share in everything as citizens and ... obey the established laws.”²⁸ But as the argument makes clear, it is assumed that faithful Christians would participate in political life. Yet the author provides no reasons why Christians would or should participate in politics. Augustine was the first theologian to address the relationship between Christians and political life.

It is significant that Augustine formulated his teaching on the nature of Christian citizenship precisely when Christianity was being blamed for the inglorious sacking of Rome by the Goths. In the *Retractions*, Augustine states that *The City of God* was written to defend Christianity from this charge.²⁹ He argued: (1) that Rome (not Christianity) was responsible for the Empire's recent demise, and (2) that public-spirited Romans could convert to Christianity and remain good citizens.

Augustine argues that a Christian's life is marked by a dual citizenship, where he or she is simultaneously a citizen in the "City of Man" and the "City of God." He bases this notion of dual citizenship on Romans 13. There the apostle Paul asserts that Christians must obey the civil authorities, since God has appointed them as his political ministers on earth.³⁰ Through temporal rulers, God uses the coercive power of civil society to control or lessen the effects of evil in the world. God has entrusted temporal rulers with the authority to punish evildoers and the obligation to promote justice. Yet Christians, according to Augustine, were not to obey simply out of fear of punishment.³¹ Rather, they were to view political authority "positively" and consider their "political obligations" as something like a religious duty.³²

For Augustine, however, there was a deeper reason why Christians were to engage political life: because the action of a Christian citizen was "rooted" in the theological virtue of charity. The injunction to love one's neighbor as oneself—the exact opposite of the asocial injunction of Epicureanism—meant that Christians were obligated to devote themselves to the good of others. Charity required that to truly love God one also had to love one's neighbor. Yet Augustine knew that if such love was not to dissipate into an abstract love of humanity it had to be practical. He thus spoke of "the order of charity," which extended from one's immediate family members to one's fellow citizens. "The order of charity" meant that while the Gospel charged "all men to be loved equally," one's principal responsibility was to care for those "who are most closely bound to you by place, time, or opportunity."³³ This principle provided, therefore, a charitable reason to defend civilization against barbarism, to side with the vices of the Romans over against the savageness of the Goths. The virtue of charity, in other words, obliged the Christian to care for his fellow citizen's well-being "as a whole embracing both a soul and a body."³⁴

The case for Christian citizenship found its first, and arguably most theological, articulation in the Bishop of Hippo's thought. For him, Christianity was able to transform the classical notion of citizenship by raising it to the level of a religious duty. By so doing, Christianity revealed that no other religion or philosophy was capable of producing

such provincial administrators, such husbands, such wives, such parents, such sons, such masters, such slaves, such kings, such judges, and finally such tax-payers and collectors of public revenue as Christian teaching requires them to be, and let them dare say this teaching is opposed to the welfare of the state, or, rather, let them even hesitate to admit that it is the greatest safety of the state.³⁵

Unlike Augustine, however, Aquinas lived within a recognizably Christian social order and, for that reason, approached the question of citizenship from a different angle. Whereas Augustine spoke of the theological foundations of citizenship, Aquinas, following Aristotle, thought of citizenship as a natural aspect of human life.³⁶ Aquinas considered politics to be inescapable because, like Aristotle, he believed human beings were by nature social and political animals.³⁷

While human beings are the most socially and politically inclined of all animals, they are also the most physically needy, which helps to explain the human propensity to live in society. The household or family is the first natural society to which persons belong. Yet the good of the family is only partial, since its principal aim is to procure the necessary goods for survival. But even the family, which is ruled by economics or the art of household management, is incapable of providing for its every need. Aquinas thought the political community completed the family unit, because as the greater community it incorporates and subsumes all lesser communities to its own end.³⁸

Because human beings are rational animals, it is not sufficient merely that they live, but that they live well.³⁹ Indeed, Aquinas contends that our natural disposition inclines us both “to know the truth and to live in society.”⁴⁰ Following Aristotle, Aquinas believed that natural human flourishing could occur only within the political community, “the most perfect of all human societies.”⁴¹ Unlike the household, the political community attains a degree of self-sufficiency. While the end of the family is the promotion of life, the end of the political community is the cultivation of human virtue. This elevated good is “common” to all citizens. Aquinas bases his notion of citizenship on the type of virtue that develops either from “ruling and being ruled in turn.” The good habits instilled in those who live under well-ordered and just laws, which are significant, given Christianity’s transpolitical claim, represent authentic human goods. As a result, Aquinas views the common good as constitutive of the citizen’s “proper” versus private good.⁴² To be sure, Aquinas held that the natural perfection of citizenship was inferior to the supernatural perfection of God’s grace. Yet insofar as grace does not destroy but perfects nature, human spiritual perfection does not negate the legitimate, natural perfection of political

life. Accordingly, for Aquinas, only the man who is “depraved, a beast as it were ... or the man who is better than a man, a god as it were,” is capable of living outside of civil society.⁴³

Conclusion

Despite his argument to the contrary, Craycraft concedes that Christians cannot simply withdraw from political life. For what other reason would he write a book on *political* theory that warns Christians of liberalism’s *theological* pitfalls? This inconsistency lies at the root of his objection to the liberal regime. On the surface, Craycraft faults liberalism for falsely proclaiming to have solved the theologico-political problem. However, the liberal regime can make this claim only by denying the tension between the requirements of political life and the duties of religious belief. In his own way, Craycraft wants to pursue a similar agenda. What he finds objectionable, in the final analysis, is that the liberal political order refuses to recognize the authority and the “primacy” of the truths contained in Christian revelation. He criticizes liberalism precisely because it does not take the truth claims of Christianity seriously. However, what this criticism fails, or perhaps *refuses*, to acknowledge is that the political order can only look at religion from its own perspective. Conceding this point does not reduce all faiths to civil religions, rather, it simply acknowledges that the political order must remain silent concerning the truth of a particular religion. To expect more from a liberal political arrangement is to assume that the theologico-political problem is resolvable.⁴⁴ Craycraft seems to call for the rule of a theologian-king who structures the entire political order around religious truths. For him, it seems, this is ultimately what it would mean for a political community to embody and uphold the principles of religious liberty set forth in the Vatican Council’s *Declaration*. Needless to say, such an arrangement compels one to go far beyond the requirements and limits of charity.

The most regrettable aspect of Craycraft’s apolitical conclusion is that some critics will miss the important issue he has raised concerning Christianity’s relationship to liberal democracy. Craycraft’s analysis of the origins and ends of the liberal regime should raise troubling questions for Christians who assume dogmatically that liberal democracy is *the* only form of government compatible with Christianity. By framing the issue in such polar terms, Craycraft only succeeds in obfuscating the fact that the original *rapprochement* of the Catholic Church with liberal democracy was *prudential*.

The American Myth of Religious Freedom shows that Christianity needs political theorists and theologians who neither uncritically celebrate liberal democracy nor “reject it out of hand.” Contemporary Christianity is best served by

theologians and political theorists who maintain critical distance from liberal democracy, even as they praise its virtues and explore its possibilities. The merit of such thinkers, on the one hand, would be in their affirmation of the benefits of liberal democracy—civic peace, religious freedom, self-government, constitutionalism—while refusing to idolize them, on the other. Such friends of liberal democracy would be profoundly aware that political liberty must be ordered liberty. Presently, Christian theologians and political theorists would be called upon to perform the necessary and salutary task of reminding citizens that democracy relies upon inherited extra-democratic goods, such as religion and morality, for its health and survival.⁴⁵

Notes

1. See 1 Timothy 1:10. Commenting on the revolutionary effect of Christianity as a transpolitical “sound doctrine,” the great nineteenth-century historian Fustel de Coulanges observed that with the emergence of Christianity “the idea that men had of the duties of citizens were modified. The first duty no longer consisted in giving one’s time, one’s strength, one’s life to the state. Politics and war were no longer the whole of man; all the virtues were no longer comprised in patriotism, for the soul no longer had a country. Man felt that he had other obligations besides that of living and dying for the city. Christianity distinguished the private from the public virtues. By giving less honor to the latter, it elevated the former. It placed God, the family, the human individual above the country, the neighbor above the city.” *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 387.

2. Kenneth R. Craycraft, Jr., *The American Myth of Religious Freedom* (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 1999).

3. *Ibid.*, 10.

4. *Ibid.*, 25.

5. *Ibid.*, 2–4.

6. *Ibid.*, 35.

7. *Ibid.*, 109.

8. *Ibid.*, 35.

9. *Ibid.*, 142.

10. *Ibid.*, 143.

11. *Ibid.*, 145.

12. *Ibid.*, 153.

13. See the preface to the 1993 French edition of Pierre Manent’s *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy*, trans. John Waggoner (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), xi–xiv.

14. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, ed. Philips Bradley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 333. For a thorough treatment of the implications of this idea, see Pierre Manent, “Democratic Man, Aristocratic Man, and Man Simply: Some Remarks on an Equivocation in Tocqueville’s Thought,” in *Modern Liberty and Its Discontents*, ed. and trans. Daniel J. Mahoney and Paul Seton (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 65–77.

15. Craycraft, *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*, 86.

16. See Peter Augustine Lawler, “James Madison and the Metaphysics of Modern Politics,” *Review of Politics* 48, 1 (Winter 1986): 92–115.

17. Craycraft, *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*, 161.

18. Peter Augustine Lawler, “Murray’s Articulation of the American Proposition,” in *John Courtney*

Murray and the American Civil Conversation, ed. Robert P. Hunt and Kenneth L. Grasso (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992).

19. John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1988), ix–x.

20. Craycraft, *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*, 187. Craycraft parts company with Lawler who limits himself to the moderate claim that Murray subtly attempted to bring Jefferson's thought into line with that of Aquinas. See Lawler, "Murray's Articulation of the American Proposition," 118. For Lawler, Murray self-consciously sought to deepen and transform what was morally, religiously, and politically undesirable in the American Founding in order to preserve the desirable elements that were there from the start.

21. Given Craycraft's argument, no passage makes this point more clearly than Murray's observation that "The authors of the *Federalist* papers were not engaged in broaching a political theory universal in scope and application, a plan for an Ideal Republic of Truth and Virtue. They were arguing for a particular Constitution ... It is in the tone of this tradition of American political writing that one should argue for the First Amendment ... Perhaps they will not satisfy the American doctrinaire, the theologizer." *We Hold These Truths*, 77.

22. *Ibid.*, 41.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Craycraft, *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*, 120.

25. *Ibid.*, v.

26. *Ibid.*, 20.

27. *Ibid.*, 26.

28. "Letter to Diognetus," in *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. and trans. Cyril C. Richardson (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1978), 217.

29. Augustine, "The Retractions," in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 60, trans. Sister Mary Inez Bogan, R.S.M. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968), II.43.1.

30. Augustine makes clear, however, that obedience is no longer obligatory if the political authority coerces a Christian to do something destructive to faith. "So far as the life of mortals is concerned, which is spent and ended in a few days, what does it matter under whose rule a man is going to die, as long as those who govern do not force impiety and iniquity." *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), V.17.

31. For Augustine, the Christian's obedience to political authority contrasts sharply with the "performative" obedience of the philosopher who orients life to a transpolitical good. In referring to Seneca, Augustine remarks: "doubtless philosophy had taught him an important lesson, that he should not be superstitious in his conception of the physical universe; but because of the laws of the country and the accepted customs, also learnt that without playing an actor's part in theatrical fictions, he should imitate such a performance in the temple." *Ibid.*, VI.11.

32. Augustine, *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans*, ed. and trans. Paula Fredrikson Landes (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), no. 74.

33. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1958), I.28.

34. *Ibid.*, I.26.

35. Augustine, "Letter 138, To Marcellinus," in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 20, trans. Sister Wilfrid Parsons, S.N.D. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1985), 48.

36. There is one kind of political action that is a noticeable and important exception to this rule, namely, Aquinas' rules for conducting a just war. He does not set the guidelines for a just war merely in terms of nature or natural virtue but in terms of the theological virtue of charity. For him, waging war points to the limits of political action. See *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 40. Thus for Aquinas, the "purity" of one's peace-loving intentions as well as the justice of one's punitive intentions is imperative in fighting a just war. Sadly, the traditional Christian notion of waging a just war with the proper intention of punishing an unjust party has been forgotten. Contemporary legal theorists such as John Finnis have obscured the fact that historically just wars were viewed by Christian theologians not merely in terms of self-defense but principally as a means for enforcing punitive just third-party interventions. See John Finnis, "The Ethics of War and Peace in the Catholic Natural

Law Tradition," in *The Ethics of War and Peace: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, ed. Terry Nardin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 15–39.

37. Aquinas, *On Kingship, To the King of Cyprus*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan, intro. Ignatius Karl Theodore Eschmann (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1982), I.4. It should be observed, however, that Aquinas' statement of human beings as social and political animals points in the direction of his eventual departure from strict Aristotelian teaching. He emphasizes the social dimension of human life to draw attention to the variegated character of human sociability. In the end, Aquinas is more interested in defending the pluralism of the medieval Christian order than with defending the uniquely political character of the Greek *polis*.

38. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 90, 3, ad.3m.

39. Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger (Notre Dame: Dumb Ox Books, 1993), 1, Lecture 1, no. 4.

40. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 94, 2.

41. Aquinas, "Commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*," in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, ed. and trans. Ernest L. Fortin and Peter D. O'Neill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), Proemium, 4.

42. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 47, 10, ad.2m.

43. Aquinas, "Commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*," 1, Lecture 1, no. 39.

44. The same mistake has been made in a much less sophisticated way by Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson in *Blinded by Might: Can the Religious Right Save America* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999).

45. This point is developed at length in Daniel J. Mahoney's impressive essay, "The Moral Foundations of Liberal Democracy," in *Public Morality, Civic Virtue, and the Problem of Modern Liberalism*, ed. Gary Quinlivan and T. William Boxx (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000).

Liberty, Right and Nature: Individual Rights in Later Scholastic Thought

Annabel S. Brett

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In 1978, Cambridge University published *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (2 volumes) by Quentin Skinner. Skinner, a professor of political science at Cambridge University, is respected as a leading authority in the English-speaking world on sixteenth-century European political thought. Approximately two decades later, Cambridge University Press released *Liberty, Right and Nature: Individual Rights in Later Scholastic Thought* by Annabel S. Brett. Her book is a wonderful complement to Skinner's work and essential for grasping