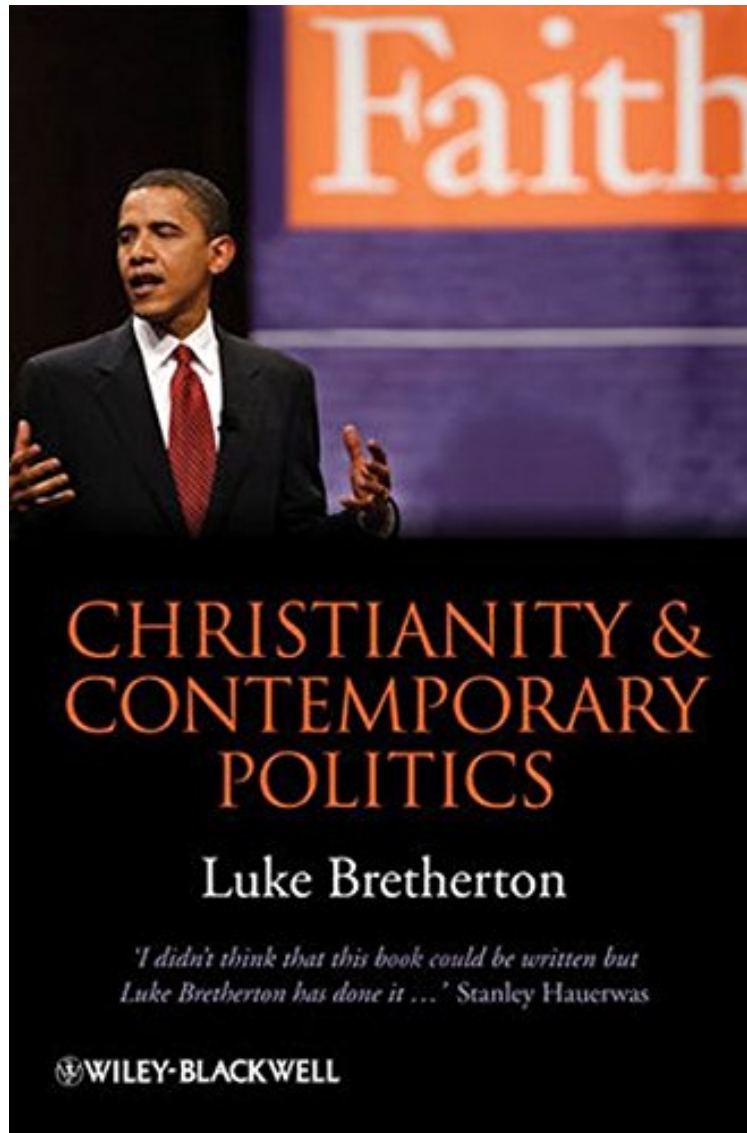


# Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness

Luke Bretherton

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**Luke Bretherton : Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Refreshing new voice in Christian Theological EthicsBy JBRBretherton's book weaves together previously published essays and new material into a whole. After the

introduction and first chapter on issues regarding church-state-welfare partnership, Bretherton examines a different aspect of human community: local, national, and global. What is so refreshing about this work is the way that Bretherton combines theology, social theory, sociology, and case studies into a powerful work of Christian theological ethics. While there is a bid of unevenness between chapters (especially the move from chapter 1 to the rest of the book), the chapter on asylum seekers and the Church's call to hallow bare life is worth the price of the book. Bretherton's book is an important one and I look forward to more contributions from this younger scholar.

0 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Supposed to be an important book on the subject, but not an enjoyable read. By sororitysis This was required reading for a Religion and Politics class in seminary. It was a hard row to hoe. And I've plowed through Augustine, Aquinas, Moltmann and others. I found the writing verbose and get ready for run on sentences. If you've got the option, skip it.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A Wonderful Synthesis of Leading Theo-Political Thought

By Johnny Walker Sure enough, Luke Bretherton's *Christianity and Contemporary Politics* has much to offer Christians seeking proper answers to questions of political policy, however, the primary significance of this book lies not in its response to particular political challenges - even pressing ones - but rather in its way of framing and exercising a faithful and robust Christian theopolitical vision. Thus, the introduction, in which he draws up his theopolitical approach, in many ways serves as the crux of the work. All that follows - his discussion of Church-state relations, community organizing, asylum, and fair trade - functions as an outworking of the vision cast in the opening pages. The brilliance of Bretherton's account is his compelling synthesis of a host of fruitful, though often divergent, strands of contemporary political theology. He is an able and appreciative interpreter of Hauerwas, Yoder, and Cavanaugh, while also offering charitable engagements with Radical Orthodoxy (mainly John Milbank) and Oliver O'Donovan. Additionally, Hannah Arendt, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer play key roles in his account. The backbone of his theological politics, though, perhaps rest most fully in St. Augustine and his Two Cities schema, being that it plays a determinative, governing role throughout the whole of the work. Thus, Bretherton joins the ever-increasing ranks of political Augustinians. Of course, the history of Augustine's reception proves that that might not mean much (consider that Neibhur, Jean-Bethke Elshtain, Milbank, and Cavanaugh all lay claim to Augustine's authority). So we might ask which Augustine Bretherton has been reading. It seems to be the Augustine of Eric Gregory's *Politics and the Order of Love*, and perhaps Cavanaugh's *Migrations of the Holy*. In other words, the right Augustine - if I'm permitted to make such a bombastic claim!

There is much that is laudable in Bretherton's volume, though, I consider one of his most timely and important contributions to be his warning about our constructed narratives of modernity, for no doubt, they have played crucial roles in much of late-modern ecclesial political thinking. He writes, in a consciously Augustinian mode, that "we are neither falling from a golden age nor are we locked inot a historically deterministic process of inevitable change in one direction," as such, "faithful political witness must reject overly deterministic declension or ascension narratives about the nature of political life" (p. 10). I think this is exactly right, and, in fact, that's why I so commend Ephraim Radner's *A Brutal Unity*, for it represents just the kind of chastened account of modernity that Bretherton advocates. Due to his resisting these simple accounts, Bretherton is able to be both a forceful critic of liberalism (as the main product of modernity) and a cautious, though, grateful recipient of its gifts. There is so much to be said about this volume. It has a thickness and density that demands multiple readings. Bretherton has really done a great service to the Church in helping her think through what it means to live faithfully in the in-between of Christ two comings, as resident aliens awaiting the restoration of all things. And that is a crucial point. This a book for the Church. It is a churchly, theological politics - with all the particularity that that implies. Bretherton's *Christianity and Contemporary Politics* certainly lays claim to be one of the best books in recent years for those seeking to tread the tricky path of late-modern politics. NOTE: This book was provided free of charge in exchange for an honest review.

Congratulations to Luke Bretherton on winning the 2013 Michael Ramsey Prize for Theological Writing for *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*! Relations between religious and political spheres continue to stir passionate debates on both sides of the Atlantic. Through a combination of theological reflection and empirical case studies, Bretherton succeeds in offering timely and invaluable insights into these crucial issues facing 21st century societies. Explores the relationship between Christianity and contemporary politics through case studies of faith-based organizations, Christian political activism and welfare provision in the West; these case studies assess initiatives including community organizing, fair trade, and the sanctuary movement Offers an insightful, informative account of how Christians can engage politically in a multi-faith, liberal democracy Integrates debates in political theology with inter-disciplinary analysis of policy and practice regarding religious social, political and economic engagement in the USA, UK, and continental Europe Reveals how Christians can help prevent the subversion of the church and even of politics itself by legal, bureaucratic, and market mechanisms, rather than advocating withdrawal or assimilation Engages with the intricacies of contemporary politics whilst integrating systematic and historical theological reflection on political and economic life

Winner of the 2013 Michael Ramsey Prize for Theological Writing! A deeply hospitable book, which is rooted in

evangelical orthodoxy, but is clearly open to public dialogues and unafraid to speak within them in its own accent [Brethertons] account of listening as a Christian political practice is outstanding and inspiring. This is a very fine book, which deserves the attention and engagement of the practical theological community. (International Journal of Practical Theology, 19 July 2012) My hope is that the ideas contained here will not remain in the academy but will provide momentum for a challenging Christian encounter with the issues and injustices of our political and social context. (Modern Believing, 1 April 2012) "[Bretherton] establishes himself in this book as a leading figure in political theology by giving a profound synthetic account of political theory and theology." (Church Times, 2010) "I'll be giving Christianity and Contemporary Politics to my graduate students and others seeking to become authors and academics. It is a model of the kind of book a scholar should be looking to write." (Christian Century, June 2011) "This is a wonderful book, perhaps the best book on contemporary Christianity and politics in liberal nation-states I have read. It is both based in concrete practices and theoretically aware. Most of all, its author exhibits the virtues necessary to undertake such a task: he is generous, faithful, and engaged with real communities of Christians and others. I will be using this book with students, and recommending it to colleagues." (Studies in Christian Ethics, June 2011) "I strongly recommend this book as one of the most fascinating accounts of the relationship between politics and religion in contemporary society. The author has mastered very skillfully several bodies of literature from different disciplines and presented a new synthesis of them. He points a way forward that takes into account traditional ways of understanding religious faith and practice but practiced in the very new and emergent conditions of the twenty-first century." (Politics, Religion Ideology, December 2011) "This book is important, though not always an easy read. However, the effort will reward those who persevere with new insights about the mission of the church and the witness of the individual Christian. It should prove particularly refreshing to those who train ministers and church-related community workers, as well as to all who struggle with political and community issues within the church in its Big Society." (Reform, 1 May 2011) "Over the past decade political theology has become one of the most energetic (and polemical) conversations in the field of theology. Bretherton makes a signal contribution to these debates as a voice characterized by critical charity. While the field has tended to line up in camps (e.g., Niebuhrians vs. Hauenvasians), Bretherton is eager to affirm what's right in both without shrinking from criticizing either. The great virtue of this book is that it moves the conversation from the abstract environs of national politics and 'church-state' questions to the nitty-gritty environs of the municipal pursuit of the common good (or rather, as Bretherton emphasizes, goods in common). Changing the scope and scale of the question, the book provides a fresh analysis through a series of case studies that are attentive to place - considering, for example, the community organizing of Saul Alinsky (the space of Obama's apprenticeship) as a case of the church concretely impacting the shared space of common goods. Neither beset by worries about Constantinianism, nor motivated by pretensions to Christendom, this book deserves wide attention." (CHOICE, December 2010) "I cannot commend it highly enough." (Regent's s, 1 October 2010) "Bretherton is one of the most helpful voices engaging culture in a way that results in robust witness and faithful Gospel proclamation. And so this book is enthusiastically recommended to all concerned with relevant Christian witness in ever changing Western political situations." (European Journal of Theology, 2010) I confess I did not think this book could be written. But it can be done because Bretherton has done it. He has written this marvelous book that engages the complex theoretical issues necessary to develop a constructive theological politics without losing sight of concrete social challenges associated with community organizing, immigration, and consumerism. Bretherton has set a new standard in Christian political reflection. Stanley Hauerwas, Duke Divinity School "Sophisticated, erudite, deeply insightful, and written with a passion born out of political engagement. Bretherton pushes the field of political theology into fresh pastures ... This book will serve many, not just political theorists and theologians." Gaving D'Costa, University of Bristol

From the Back Cover

Through insightful case studies of faith-based organizations, Christian political activism, and welfare provision in the West, this innovative, informative, and wide-ranging book shows how Christians can engage politically in a multi-faith, liberal democracy. The case studies include assessments of initiatives such as community organizing, fair trade, and the Sanctuary movement. Bretherton integrates debates in political theology with analysis of policy and practice regarding religious social, political, and economic engagement in the USA, UK, and continental Europe, but avoids presenting an idealized archetype for churchstate relations. Instead, he engages with the intricacies of contemporary politics while integrating systematic and historical theological reflection on political and economic life. The book delineates the ways in which faithful witness and the forging of a common good at local, national, and global levels emerge through a dynamic of listening, judgment, and proclamation between Christians and those of other faiths and of no faith. Rather than advocate withdrawal or assimilation, the book reveals how faithful witness can help prevent the subversion of the church and even of politics itself by legal, bureaucratic, and market mechanisms. Relations between religious and political spheres continue to stir passionate debates on both sides of the Atlantic. Through a combination of theological reflection and empirical case studies, Bretherton succeeds in offering timely and invaluable insights into these important issues affecting our society today.