

The Limits of Liberal Democracy: Politics and Religion at the End of Modernity. By Scott H. Moore. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009. 161pp. \$18.00.

In his new book, Scott Moore goes far to convince Christian Americans that their souls ought to be ill at ease with the powerful ways in which *American Liberal Democracy* has come to shape their quotidian lives. In a phrase, liberalism has exiled philosophy from politics. In doing so it has replaced religion as society's crafter of souls and ceased to remind humans of uncomfortable truths about how they ought to act towards one another and the personal costs to liberty that such responsibilities require.

Readers familiar with the liberalism-communitarian debate of the last decade will recognize the contours of this thesis and the intuition of what needs to be done about it, namely, taking the business of Christian community-building seriously. What is novel and powerful about Moore's analysis, however, is that he pulls this criticism out of parallel Christian dissent from within two very different political traditions: the progressive-liberal-left and conservative-neo-conservative-right constellations of American politics. Here that dissent is distilled in the figures of John Richard Neuhaus and Michael Baxter and the controversies surrounding either which began to tear them, and others like them, from their respective political homes in the late 1990s.

Moore uses the first part of the book to give us exciting accounts of Neuhaus's *First Things* Symposium, which challenged judicial activism, and the appointment of Michael Baxter to the faculty of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, who challenged the loyalty of Christian Americans to the United States' government. Both figures uncompromisingly

proclaimed that the truth of the Gospels remains counter-cultural and ought to lead Christian souls to break with the decisions of their patriot nation.

Through the recounting of these two stories, Moore argues that the Christian community, when properly understood as a polis, represents a political alternative to liberalism for both Christians of the left and right and which allows the truth of religion to order humans' relationships while avoiding the traps of theocracy, confessional state or retreat. What would such a polis look like? Moore suggests that it would be governed by "extraordinary politics" and gives us the example of the practice of hospitality as one of its forms

It is less clear from Moore's argument, however, that the practice of extraordinary politics cannot flourish alongside the procedures and rules of liberalism. Part of the problem is in his distinction, which guides the book, between liberal democratic politics as statecraft (a good thing) from liberal democratic politics as the "rules that order our lives together in the polis" (a bad thing). It is difficult to disaggregate liberal democratic politics as such without a closer examination of the relationships between 1) liberal democracy as statecraft and 2) the political philosophy (or philosophies) underpinning the life of the polis (or *poleis*) of a nation, and 3) the written rules (i.e. laws) their interactions produce that govern human relationships within the greater polis of the modern nation-state.

Extraordinary politics should help Christians discern when to resist bad rules from forming their souls, but it is not obvious whether Christians have better options for politically mobilizing people outside the Christian polis other than through debates which hew to the procedures and rules of liberalism in the quotidian. Even for Christians within the Christian polis, liberal democratic rules and procedures come in handy for making decisions about

contentious policies affecting the life of the community that not even the most hospitality-infused consultations can resolve, such as the many policy positions, from welfare to war to healthcare, that set apart a Baxter from a Neuhaus. This is a version of liberal democracy which is more than just a last resort for solving intractable problems as well as more than simple statecraft in the sense that Moore intends. It is liberal democracy as a daily guide to decision-making which attempts to provide some equitable safeguard on individual dignity and liberty for human interactions. *The Limits of Liberal Democracy* is an appealing exhortation to Christians of all political persuasions to let the Gospel laws of love, and not the philosophic ideals of liberalism, guide the way they go about doing politics. We are still left, however, to wrestle with the proper institutional shapes that such an exhortation calls for.

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