

*Faith in the Public Square*. By Rowan Williams. New York: Bloomsbury, 2012. Pp. vi + 344. \$24.14.

In this series of essays (originally lectures), Williams broaches a broad theory about faith and the social order. He deftly explores disputed meanings about secularism and secularization. In part I, “Has Secularism Failed?,” W. contends that secularism leaves us linguistically bereaved—it lacks an adequate vocabulary to speak about evil. Secularism, by default, often falls into a species of functionalism and ends up generating a social practice dominated by instrumental/managerial considerations. Secularism can end up being ultimately an exclusive, even antihuman, closure. Suspicious and uncomfortable about “inaccessible” or not readily accessible dimensions of life, it forgets that art is unsecular, as is history (because it contains many depths and perspectives). But W. reminds us to make a distinction between programmatic secularism and a procedural secularism. The latter allows no legal privilege in society for a specific religious position but need not pretend that religious positions be seen as mere private vagaries and choices.

In part II, the section where liberalism, pluralism, and the law meet, W. speaks of living within limits. Secularism extols freedom, but if secularism becomes an ideology, it forgets that freedom must involve the possibility of questioning the way things are. Liberty is more than just consumer choice. Forms of secularism that deny public voice to religions tend to see religion and ideological difference as just mere issues of private choice. In so doing, they effectively deny the seriousness of difference itself. Most importantly, by relegating religious voices to the area of purely private choice, secularism asks those who are religious to reduce their most intimate and decisive moral aspirations and beliefs to the level of mere private choice. Moreover, W. contends, there is no purely neutral, uncontested definition of “secularism.” In some accounts it means merely a separation of church and state. In other definitions it entails a separation of religion from society and a privatization of religion.

Because of pluralism, legitimate rival loyalties to the state exist. It is not the case that the state as such is or ever can be neutral to all moral goods. W. champions pluralist theories of the state (and a robust civil society). He refutes theories of a single sovereign power from which all other entities in society derive their legitimacy. It is not the case, W. argues, in a chapter entitled “Religion, Diversity and Tolerance,” that the state has no moral claims, but it is a mistake to see these claims as beyond challenge in any imaginable circumstances. To be sure, there is a legitimate, even necessary, notion of a common citizenship, but the status of citizen neither exhausts other legitimate identities nor should it always have the last word.

The much-banded term *multiculturalism* will be a recipe for balkanization and ghettoization if it ignores history (all cultures have histories; all evolve; all or most have interacted with other cultures). A delusion in dealing with plural and partially conflicting cultures is to seek only for some common core. Too much emphasis on this motif makes us forget that often the differences between cultures and/or religions are what is interesting. W. references a project, much like that of Francis Clooney’s “comparative theology,” of a dialogue between religions and cultures and the avoidance of any too-easy seeing religions and cultures that are alien to us as simply the other.

In chapter 11, “Religious Hatred and Religious Offence,” W. allows liberty of speech, including liberty to criticize religion or particular religions, but he warns against the use of such liberty (especially through anti-Muslim speech) to inflict resentment or avoidable suffering on others. A profound difference exists between criticism and abuse of an opponent. Throughout, W. helpfully comments on Muslims in Western pluralist societies.

W. devotes several chapters to human rights but warns, “The language of human rights becomes manifestly confused and artificial when divorced from our thinking about belonging, recognition, dignity and so on” (170). Three chapters in part III deal with the environment. Key is an argument that the earth is the Lord’s and all creation is a gift. We are to act “priestly” toward the environment: to bless, give thanks, and make the right use of material things. W. warns about merely raising up the specter of possible catastrophes if we do nothing about climate change. There are no easy solutions to environmental degradation, he argues, but we need to change any myth that dupes us into thinking that there are limitless resources and technological fixes for all problems. We need a positive sense of what creating new wealth and simultaneously living within environmental limits can mean. W. urges that we undertake mainly local action on environmental issues and remarks that apparently small-scale action that changes personal habits and local possibilities and actions can make crucial contributions to change.

In part IV, W. addresses attitudes toward economics, global justice, and ethics. Part V deals with issues of virtue and the increasing globalization of our world. Enlightenment theories tend to skirt the question about virtue and the building of mutual trust in society. Part VI concentrates on religious diversity and civil agreement. As in many similar collections of disparate essays written over a span of time, there is some conceptual overlap between the essays in parts I–III and those in parts IV–VI. In many ways parts IV–VI represent applications to economics and global justice of W.’s position on faith in the public square as found in parts I–III. But in part VI, in an essay on atheism, W. argues that atheism is not a fixed specific reality; it has grown out of focused rejections to one or other specific religious discourse. Notoriously, atheists who were former Jews, Protestants, Catholics, or Muslims protest often quite different views of religion. There is no univocal notion of atheism.

I highly recommend this book. It has helpful and intriguing discussions about religion and our common life in religiously pluralistic societies. We all have much to learn from W.’s work.

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*From Pentecost to the Triune God.* By Steven M. Studebaker. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012. Pp x + 281. \$34.

Studebaker, a Pentecostal Christian, believes he should not be satisfied to leave his personal experience of the Spirit and that of his fellow Pentecostals something to be