

its sloppily relativist assumptions. Haldane's assessments of John Paul II and Cardinal Winning, both effectively obituaries, and of Benedict XVI, written just after his election to the papacy, present them in different ways as prophetic figures. A fourth prophetic figure that impresses Haldane is Frederic Ozanam, who founded the Society of St Vincent de Paul in 1835. His example shows the contemporary world how to combine study with both prayer and the dedicated service of the poor.

A refreshing feature of Haldane's writing is his avoidance of polarisation or ideology. He argues that both 'right' and 'left' in the Church (labels which he thinks in any case misapplied here) have focused on externals, whether the liturgy or social action. Meanwhile we have neglected the spiritual formation and devotional life that ought to nourish both theological discussion and practical action. Hence Haldane's respect for Ozanam whose life held all these elements in balance. Orthodoxy need not, indeed should not, stifle creativity; we need both fidelity and imagination, both prayerfulness and justice. The vision that Haldane outlines is both coherent and challenging: a courteous but uncompromising call to the Church in Britain to wake from its slumbers.

MARGARET ATKINS

RELIGION IN PUBLIC LIFE: MUST FAITH BE PRIVATISED? by Robert Trigg
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While the media continue their insistence that Members of Parliament should keep their religious faith to themselves, strident religious voices are demanding that 'Catholic MPs' 'defend the Catholic Faith in the Commons'. Clearly there could be a real tension for any democratically elected politician (of any party) between their faith and what is generally regarded as 'the State' for which now read wider mediated 'secular society' and not just the House of Commons debating chamber. Some now insist that 'religious politicians' should resign from the Commons. As Cardinal Keith O'Brien turned up the oppositional heat against abortion, Jackie Ashley responded with: 'If any MP really thinks their personal religious views take precedence over everything else then they should leave the House of Commons. Their place is in church, mosque, synagogue or temple. Parliament is the place for compromises, for negotiations in a secular sphere under the general overhead light of the liberal tradition. So liberalism is privileged is it? Yes, for without it none of these religions ... would have such an easy time. Cardinals come to terms with the society we live in' (*Guardian* 4th June 2007).

Commentator Janet Daley stated: 'In the contest between the principles of modern democracy and doctrines of faith, democracy and the rule of secular law must always win' (*Daily Telegraph* 11th February 2008). Yet at the same time, along the corridors of the Palace of Westminster, the House of Lords Select Committee on Religious Offences in England and Wales boldly declared 'the UK is not a secular state'.

Every day 'faith schools', 'religious curriculum', the Human Fertilization and Embryology Bill, abortion and euthanasia, blasphemy laws and the wearing of distinctive religious symbols and clothing, equality laws and adoption societies, the extent of Sharia based laws, Sunday working, food preparation regulations, state funding of religious based charity organisations, even the appointment of Bishops to the House of Lords and the legal restrictions on the Monarch's faith commitment, all demonstrate that faith matters naturally leak into the political system. There is not a single department of state that can avoid engaging with religious approaches.

Despite the strenuous efforts of media commentators and philosophers such as A C Grayling, Simon Blackburn, Julian Baggini and of course Richard Dawkins to lock out any religious contribution to the contemporary political debate, religious matters keep seeping through into the public square – some with dramatic violence.

Gordon Brown's 'Christianity' was welcomed as 'of the harder for a rich man to pass through the eye of a needle variety rather than God told me to launch a war model' – but still 'for the average Brit a little scary' (*The Independent* 30 May 2008). Responding even to religious matters with anything hinting of a religious background is to be dismissed as at best irrational, at worst equivalent to the Yorkshire Ripper 'hearing voices' (*Daily Mirror* 9th March 2008).

Politicians especially are expected to keep their faith to themselves (though occasionally they are allowed out to a place of private worship) and certainly public declarations of faith – other than vague references to a set of 'universal values' – will evoke accusations of psychiatric imbalance or simply dismissive ridicule. In other words it is generally believed that commitment to religion seriously clouds political judgement.

In this climate the philosopher Roger Trigg in *Religion in Public Life* (subtitled *Must Faith be Privatised?*) refuses to be pushed back into the closet and steadily insists that in asserting such a forceful dismissal of religious input (and the Christian – Anglican – tradition in the UK) liberal secularism is not only deliberately denying its roots, which are the sources of its strengths, but is cutting off future resources. Some theologies faced with the liberal secular 'privatisation' agenda – such as John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (leaning on the work of the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre) – have responded by insisting on their commitment to Christianity as a radical challenge to secular state orthodoxy, suggesting a 'don't call us, we'll ring you' approach as they try to 'out-narrate' rival traditions. Trigg does not engage with them in this book. He marches straight past contemporary philosophical and theological debates and pitches his tent right there in the public square and invites those who would argue that faith should be confined to the privatised outer limits to force him off.

Trigg's work is not so much a Christian appeal for religion to be taken more seriously in the public square as an insistence that those who are exerting themselves, whether as philosophers, commentators, or judges defending the State, expose the detailed workings of their arguments. Politicians tend to neglect the 'big questions' of the purposes and ends of human beings but they should at least insist on thought-through patterns of good reasoning. Trigg challenges secularism's claims of 'neutrality and universality' in its approach to religion in state education, its unchallenged obsequiance to science, its loose multiculturalism, or its transfixation with the rhetoric of human rights. He gets stuck into the details of the arguments, including official national court judgements, revealing too often a complacent acceptance of unsustainable arguments that have become uncritical received wisdom. Surely, he piquantly argues, 'the state cannot be neutral on the desirability of murder?'

Trigg's work is a sustained critique of relativism and a defence of the concept of truth. But in *Religion in Public Life* he stresses the need to retain the ability – and criteria – with which to discriminate between types of belief in the face of public refusals to define or limit the classification of religion (cf House of Commons notes on the Religious Hatred Bill June 2008). While the account of the 'Church of the New Song', invented by US prisoners to get sherry and steak every Friday and recognised officially by the US Court of Appeal is amusing, Trigg spells out, in a good piece of argument, that 'relativism takes its stand on a desire for equal treatment of different beliefs. If, though, this is because of belief in the importance of human equality and dignity, these are not relative values. The category of the human is of universal importance and religions must be unacceptable when they

aim to undermine respect for all humans' (p.47). Otherwise 'why should any religion appear to be sacrosanct even if it is repugnant, evil or just plain daft (p.48). Human sacrifice, polygamy and harming children (Trigg takes on cases of the Amish and Christian Scientists) need challenging, as 'we should be able to reason about what is deeply harmful to individuals and the community...' (p.61). Furthermore, 'we must be able to make rational distinctions between religion and other forms of belief and between different types of religion. Even within the ambit of Christianity discriminations have to be made' (p.48).

Though Trigg claims *Religion in Public Life* examines the 'impact of philosophical positions on current politics and the law in a range of countries' (p.6) it does much more than that. There is a reflective dynamic that turns the arguments to the most fundamental question of 'why people are equal', a question religions (including Christian traditions) have still to work on answering publicly. Trigg does not here move into the depths of what it is about human beings that makes it true that they are free and equal, but he suggests that without a metaphysical, if not theological, basis for equality, a 'common parent' that transcends the 'mitochondrial Eve' of the biologists, then 'neither the common good nor equality are sustainable workable concepts'. In other words Trigg proposes that we may need religion to 'explain to our institutions about how our society should be organised' (p.83). The unsettling paradox he recognises is that the Christian emphasis on an individual's freedom, liberty and equal status leads into a liberalism that denies its roots and undermines Christianity and 'a Christian nation for reasons of Christian principle, stemming from a belief in what is seen as our God-given equality and freedom, becomes a secular nation committed to no religion' (p.88). Yet he points out that a state 'holding no beliefs cannot uphold freedom and toleration'.

If religion is banished from the public stage in the name of equality and respect we are still left with the question of 'why people are equal'. What's more 'any state has to make judgements about what is conducive to the public good. Any government interested in anything beyond the bland exercise of power has to have a moral vision and this has to come from somewhere' (p.145).

We can therefore step back from Trigg's fray in the public square (whether in the law courts of the UK, USA, Canada, the European Union, or Moldova) to tackle the big questions of whether we can agree on 'the common good' or no longer avoid Jacques Maritain's suspended 'why' question in relation to the UN declaration of particular 'human rights'. There is still a pressing need to develop a contemporary 'theology of the state'.

Religion in Public Life suggests that digging deeper into our own traditions may enable us to find resources to get beyond the proposition that 'all that can be agreed is that people ought to be free to disagree', and to work to reconnect the *telos* of the common good with that of human freedom. *Religion in Public Life* is an unsettling book, not least because we are jolted into realising that there is so much more work to be done.

JOHN BATTLE MP