

above. In the end, this distinction is directed at artists and theologians as a principle for dialogue and mutual critique. Patrick Sherry is calling us, in a manner reminiscent of his intellectual mentor Wittgenstein, to reconsider the primacy that lived life and experience, albeit aesthetic experience, have in our processes of thought. It is when we attend to our own deep-seated images of redemption that the arts reveal their critical potential and open the door of dialogue onto a wider horizon of human experience.

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GOD AND CAESAR: Personal Reflections on Politics and Religion by Shirley Williams, *Continuum*, 2003, Pp. 147, £12.99, hbk

Those who maintain that politics should pursue the common good find it extraordinary that in recent times politicians have regularly denied that ethics has any role to play in politics. In 1997 a British Foreign Secretary (Robin Cook) finally grasped the nettle and announced that Britain would henceforth implement foreign policy 'with an ethical dimension'. Baroness Shirley Williams of Crosby, who considers herself both a cradle Catholic and a convert, recognizes that politics is 'bound up with the making of moral choices' and requires also a religious foundation. In *God and Caesar* she offers a series of reflections about politics, public life and the Catholic Church.

Christian thinkers who contribute to political theology rarely have political experience on which to draw. If a political theology is to be worthy of serious consideration it must draw too on political experience. Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords and Professor Emeritus at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Baroness Williams has a wealth of experience on which to draw both in the practice of politics and in the teaching of political science. She was part of the Labour Cabinet from 1974 to 1979, and has served as Secretary of State for Education and Science, and Paymaster-General (1976–79). In 1981 she was co-founder of the SDP.

In eight brief and lively chapters spiced with autobiographical detail the author discusses the role that Christianity has to play in society today. She begins by discussing the secularization of modern society and the decline and privatization of religion. While this presents a challenge to believers the modern world is faced with the same choice between doing good or evil and the Gospel provides us with 'the basis for that moral choice'. Deference to hierarchy based on social or family relationships is dying and this has weakened both political and ecclesiastical authority. There is a need for good men

and women to enter public life, but a Christian attracted to public life is entering a demeaned profession and subjecting kith and kin to unwanted media attention. Williams notes that the priesthood is facing similar problems.

God and Caesar unapologetically promotes a Catholic vision of international justice and highlights the achievements of Catholic social thinking. This is an experienced politician who has great expectations of the Church. She suggests that the Pope should assemble the best economists and community leaders to shape a market that is just, to put the weight of the Church behind those who are powerless, and to demand of the rich recognition of their obligations to human society. At a time when politicians are sceptical of the State's ability to shape markets this is certainly a novel idea. In an age of global terrorism when national sovereignty has become an 'obsolete principle' there is a need, says Williams, for scholars in the Church to define the global norms for intervention. She is generally optimistic about the state of international relations and encouraged by the growth of the European Union the establishment of an International Criminal Court and the growing political influence of voluntary organizations.

Those familiar with her views will not be surprised by her reflections on the Church and its moral teaching. Baroness Williams is an old fashioned liberal Catholic – respectful of Church authority but dismayed by *Humanae Vitae*. She points out that if the Church had made a sharp distinction between contraception and abortion it might have strengthened the hand of Catholic MPs in the debates over the 1967 Abortion Bill. The Church should be less centralized and the Curia less secretive, conservative and rigid. She clearly doesn't expect the Church to be a democratic institution in the secular political sense but makes the valid point that in the Church as in public life trust now has to be earned. The people of God may still be sheep 'but they are educated and inquiring sheep!' She would like women to have a greater say in Church affairs and thinks that the question of ordaining women should at least be discussed.

The warmth and ease with which Williams discusses so many topical issues make this a very engaging book and one difficult to put down. One expects a good politician to be well informed, articulate and inspiring and Baroness Williams never fails to be all three whether in her public appearances or in her writings. The reputation of politicians is not at its apogee and Williams puts up a spirited defence of her fellow politicians. Whatever she would like us to believe about her colleagues, modest, sensible, truthful, kind, are not the epithets that one generally associates with politicians or their books. Nevertheless, these terms do apply to *God and Caesar* no less than to its author

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