

BOOK REVIEWS

***Faith in Democracy: Framing a Politics of Deep Diversity*, by Jonathan Chaplin**

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Two decades ago, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and philosopher Jürgen Habermas famously debated the prepolitical foundations of the democratic constitutional state. While their respective Catholic and secular worldviews could not have been much farther apart, the two German thinkers found common ground in the need for an equitable relationship between those adhering to secular and religious worldviews, including in the realm of politics.

Jonathan Chaplin, with his *Faith in Democracy: Framing a Politics of Deep Diversity*, demonstrates the richness of the neo-Calvinist tradition on how religion can flourish within a constitutional democracy. Chaplin is one of a few dozen academics heeding the call Abraham Kuyper issued in his *Lectures on Calvinism* “to go back to the living root of the Calvinist plant ... fully in accordance with our actual life in these modern times.” Chaplin, a political theologian, explores the meaning of public justice for political communities in times of fierce polarization.

Faith in Democracy shares the optimism of Ratzinger and Habermas for deliberative democracy. Chaplin is a firm believer in good disagreement, which can be facilitated through a model of principled pluralism. In his own words, he seeks “to navigate a distinctive pathway between ... on the one hand, a newly assertive ‘exclusivist secularism,’ and, on the other, a ‘Christian nation’ response to this assertiveness” (xvi).

Chaplin witfully uses *faith* instead of *religion* to argue that secularism is on level footing with religious faiths, all having prerational assumptions (60). Consequently, the state should adopt jurisdictional secularism, not favoring any faith. Chaplin, a Brit, is consistent: even weak constitutional establishments for the Church of England should be dismantled (74). It remains, however, unclear why Chaplin rejects the possibility of neutrality but promotes it for the state. The inevitable, implicit faith-based assumptions of the government may as well be communicated transparently.

This apparent inconsistency does not take away the merit of Chaplin’s faith-friendly secularism. A useful application is the concept of public language, pitted against the prevailing “secular Esperanto” in which faith-based

arguments are outright rejected. Adherents to religious faiths should articulate their arguments in a respectful and intelligible manner, without compromising their faith. The political arena is where battles are fought *with* beliefs, not *about* beliefs.

In regard to equality legislation, Chaplin also takes an accommodative route. To safeguard associational freedom, religious exemptions should be made. In Western societies where Christians are at the whims of a liberal zeitgeist, appealing to secular tolerance may not be awfully compelling. Yet, Chaplin points to the common grace present in our political institutions, however tainted by sin they may be. And, seen in perspective to revolutionary alternatives, *Faith in Democracy* serves as a reminder for Christians to count our liberal blessings.

In dialogue with Ratzinger, Habermas called for a post-secular society, as religion is here to stay. Chaplin does valuable work fleshing out what such a society can look like. While perhaps cautiously erring on the side of liberalism, Chaplin lays the intellectual foundations for a society where those of all faiths can thrive, and where faith in democracy would be restored.

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