RELIGION IN LEGAL THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

This book examines moral issues in public and private life from a religious but not a devotional perspective. Rather than seeking to prove that one belief system or moral stance is right, it undertakes to help readers more fully understand the effect of religious beliefs and practices on ways of conceiving and addressing moral questions, without having to accept or reject any specific religious outlook. It shows how the similarities between religions and the differences within one religion are more important than the reverse. The book asks:

- Where do moral imperatives come from, and how do the answers found in religion and law interact?
- How does the fact that a moral norm is grounded in religion affect our thinking about it?
- What is the significance of the differences (and similarities) between religious and secular sources of moral norms?

Howard Lesnick, Jefferson B. Fordham Professor of Law at the University of Pennsylvania Law School, has been a law teacher for 50 years. In addition to many articles on religion and morality and on ethical responsibility in law and legal education, he has written Listening for God: Religion and Moral Discernment, Being a Lawyer: Individual Choice and Responsibility in the Practice of Law, and (with Joan F. Goodman) The Moral Stake in Education: Contested Premises and Practices.

In 2003, he received the Association of American Law Schools’ Deborah Rhode Award for outstanding contributions to public service. Lesnick is also the recipient of Community Legal Services of Philadelphia’s Equal Justice Award and the Society of American Law Teachers’ Distinguished Teaching and Service Award.
According to a rabbinical interpretation, the Lord said to Moses: “Wherever you see the trace of man there I stand before you.”

When engaged in a conversation with a person of different religious commitment I discover that we disagree in matters sacred to us, does the image of God I face disappear? Does God cease to stand before me?

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel
Summary of Contents

I. INTRODUCTIONS
1. Some Opening Prompts ............................................. 3
2. Religion and the Life of a Lawyer ................................. 12

II. MORAL OBLIGATION AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF
5. What Are the Bases of Resistance to Religiously Grounded Morality? ............................................. 105
7. Modes of Religiously Grounded Moral Discernment ............... 177

III. RELIGION AND SOME CONTEMPORARY MORAL CONTROVERSES
8. Economic Justice ...................................................... 219
9. Bioethical Questions .................................................. 256
10. Abortion ...................................................................... 281
11. Homosexual Sex ........................................................ 321

IV. THE INTERACTION BETWEEN RELIGION AND THE SECULAR LAW
12. “Render unto Caesar”: Religion and (Dis)Obedience to Law .................................................. 357
13. Religiously Grounded Morality and the Reach of Public Law .................................................. 412
14. Capital Punishment ...................................................... 435
15. War ......................................................................... 458

V. RESPONDING TO RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY
17. Jewish-Christian Understanding: Transcending the Legacy of History ............................................. 534

VI. RELIGIOUSLY GROUNDED MORAL DECISION-MAKING IN PROFESSIONAL LIFE
18. Religiously Grounded Decision-Making in Law Practice .................................................. 573
Contents

Preface xix

PART I. INTRODUCTIONS

1 Some Opening Prompts 3
   Deuteronomy 26:1–11 4
   Isaiah 58:2–9 4
   Matthew 6:19–34 5
   Romans 7:7–12 5
   *The Babylonian Talmud*, Order Nezikin, Tractate Mezia 6
   Andrew W. McThenia, Jr., “Civil Resistance or Holy Obedience? Reflections from within a Community of Resistance” (1991) 7
   Jalalu-‘D-Din Muhammad Rumi, “The Travelers Who Ate the Young Elephant” (thirteenth century) 10
   C. S. Lewis, “Footnote to All Prayers” (1965) 11
   Note: A catalogue of provocative prompts 11

2 Religion and the Life of a Lawyer 12
   Howard Lesnick, “Personal Fulfillment in the Changing World of Law Practice: Opportunities and Obstacles” (1999) 12
   Timothy W. Floyd, “The Practice of Law as a Vocation or Calling” (1998) 16
   Seth Kreimer, “The Responsibilities of the Jewish Lawyer” (1993) 19
   Note on the interface between religious and professional norms 27
## PART II. MORAL OBLIGATION AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF

### 3 What Is the Relation between the Moral Dimension of Obligation and Religious Belief?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arthur Allen Leff, “Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law” (1979)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on the “Grand Sez Who”</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Berke, “A Jewish Appreciation of Catholic Social Teaching,”</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on the challenge of “unchallengeability”</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States v. Seeger, 326 F.2d 846 (2d Cir. 1964)</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States v. Seeger, 380 U.S. 163 (1965)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on the Seeger decision: “The stern and moral voice of [one’s own] conscience”</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Worship,” in Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays (1903)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on Bertrand Russell and Clifford Geertz and the core avowals of religion</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on obligation, rights, and indifference to the vanity of ends</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on the epistemic power of love</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4 Does Religious Belief Necessarily Have Moral Content? Does Religious Belief Have Any Necessary Moral Content?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timothy D. Lytton, “‘Shall Not the Judge of the Earth Deal Justly?’: Accountability, Compassion, and Judicial Authority in the Biblical Story of Sodom and Gomorrah” (2002)</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on the Divine Lawgiver as accountable teacher</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Mann, The Tables of the Law (1945)</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on Thomas Mann and the source and content of the moral law</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo Tolstoy, “The Three Hermits, An Old Legend Current in the Volga District” (1886)</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on Tolstoy’s Bishop and the persistence of choice amid necessity</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John XXIII, Pacem in Terris [Peace on Earth] (1963)</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contents

Second Vatican Council, Dignitatis Humanae [Dignity of the Human Person] (1965) 102

Note on the variousness of moral imperatives grounded in biblical religion 104

5 What Are the Bases of Resistance to Religiously Grounded Morality? . . . . . . 105


Note on the dark side of religious politics 108


Frederick Mark Gedicks and Roger Hendrix, “Uncivil Religion: Judeo-Christianity and the Ten Commandments” (2007) 117

Note on the charge of triumphalism 122


Note on the charge of legitimated oppression 129


Note on the charge of abdication of moral responsibility for judgment 134


Note on resistance embedded in acceptance 141

6 Concepts of God, Scripture, and Revelation: The Meanings of “Divine Inspiration” . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 142


Note: What is the Bible? Identifying our choices 144

John E. MacArthur, Reckless Faith: When the Church Loses Its Will to Discern (1998) 145

Second Vatican Council, Dei Verbum [The Word of God] (1965) 148


Note on divergent implications of certainty 153


Note on revelation and response 159

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7 Modes of Religiously Grounded Moral Discernment</th>
<th>177</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Finnis, Moral Absolutes: Tradition, Revision, and Truth (1991)</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pius XI, Casti Connubii [Of Chaste Marriage] (1931)</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on scripture- and tradition-based moral discernment in Roman Catholic and Orthodox Jewish teaching</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on the search for a grounding of imperatives in liberal religion</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on Thich Nhat Hanh: A Buddhist way</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on finding guidance for evaluating specific substantive legal principles in the underlying premises of a faith tradition</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PART III. RELIGION AND SOME CONTEMPORARY MORAL CONTROVERSIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8 Economic Justice</th>
<th>219</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Note on Biblical Israel and the moral claims of the poor</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contents

Note on contemporary Protestant and Catholic expressions of scripturally based egalitarian commitments 237
Shane Claiborne, “Sharing Economic Resources with Fellow Community Members and the Needy among Us,” School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism, ed. The Rutba House (2006) 238
Note on the dangers of joining the YACHT Club: “People are not crucified for helping poor people. People are crucified for joining them.” 240
Note on Catholic and evangelical skepticism about redistributive moral norms 250
Note on conflicting biblical norms and environmental ethics 255

9 Bioethical Questions .................................................. 256
Note on the foundations of Jewish bioethics: “He who gave the soul should take it.” 265
Kevin O’Rourke, “Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide: A Response to Edmund Pellegrino” (1997) 271
Note on papal teaching and the end of life 272
Note on Hans Jonas: Seeking wisdom “when we believe in it least” 279

10 Abortion ................................................................. 281
Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, “Project Wittenberg: Abortion in Perspective” (1984) 281
Churchwide Assembly, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, “Social Teaching Statement on Abortion” (1991) 286
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), “Presbyterian 101, Abortion”</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on the diversity of official Christian witness on the moral status of abortion</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on the (in)separability of religion from emotion and reason in moral discernment</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on being morally responsible in a context of “choice”: “You have to listen to every story”</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katha Pollitt, “Hentoff, Are You Listening?” (1985)</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on Pollitt on Hentoff: Should we try to think “reasonably” about anger?</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on a vision of “a more excellent way”</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Homosexual Sex</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on agreement on the fact of long-standing condemnation, amid a cacophony of explanations and judgments</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeffrey Stout, “How Charity Transcends the Culture Wars” (2005)</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on forging a new tradition</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A very short note, not offered as a proof-text</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Contents

## PART IV. THE INTERACTION BETWEEN RELIGION AND THE SECULAR LAW

12 “Render unto Caesar”: Religion and (Dis)Obedience to Law ................................. 357  
   Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter from Birmingham City Jail (1963) 357  
   Note on the Letter from Birmingham City Jail 365  
   Note on the AFSC challenge to employer sanctions 373  
   Note on the Sanctuary prosecutions 386  
   Note on the conscience rights of lawyers and health-care providers 400  
   Andrew W. McThenia, Jr., “Civil Resistance or Holy Obedience? Reflections from within a Community of Resistance” (1991) 401  
   Note on effectiveness, futility, and “Holy Obedience” 410

13 Religiously Grounded Morality and the Reach of Public Law ................................. 412  
   Note on “the freedom of responsible people to search for truth” in an “objective moral order” 414  
   Note on grounding freedom in the ubiquity of human sinfulness 424  
   Note on the ambiguity of complexity 432

14 Capital Punishment ........................................................................................................ 435  
   Antonin Scalia, “God’s Justice and Ours” (2002) 437  
   Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution on Capital Punishment” (2000) 438  
   Note on the Headman’s Axe: Who is doing what? 440  


Note on twentieth-century Christian witness: The inevitable interplay of theology and secular wisdom 453


Note on “the necessity of being the Church” 456


Note on just and unjust wars; again, the necessity of embedding prudential reasoning and empirical factors in the effort to “decipher” a religious obligation 464

John Courtney Murray, “Remarks on the Moral Problem of War” (1959) 465

George F. Kennan, “Foreign Policy and Christian Conscience” (1959) 467


Note on the (un)reality of just-war constraints on political and military decision makers 471

Mark Twain, “The War Prayer” (1923) 473


Note on the challenge of Christian pacifism 484

PART V. RESPONDING TO RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY


Note on the justification of religious exclusivism 493


Note on the (in)compatibility of inconsistent religious beliefs 497


Note on variant meanings of “belief” 505
PART VI. RELIGIOUSLY GROUNDED MORAL DECISION-MAKING IN PROFESSIONAL LIFE

18 Religiously Grounded Decision-Making in Law Practice

Azizah Al-Hibri, “On Being a Muslim Corporate Lawyer” (1996) 582
John Paul II, “Address to the Prelate Auditors, Officials and Advocates of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota” (2002) 586
Note on the breadth and sources of religious discernment in law practice 588
Note on grounding discernment in an expansive understanding of religion 606

Copyright Permission Acknowledgments 607
Authors of Works Reprinted 615
Scriptural Passages 617
Index 621
Preface

This book examines moral issues in public and private life from a religious perspective, without tying the inquiry to any specific tradition of revelation. Its subject is the relation between religion and moral obligations (including obligations to support or oppose, or to obey or disobey, certain legal requirements). It does not, however, proceed from a devotional perspective. It seeks rather to understand religious perspectives at work in the arenas under consideration and to articulate their relevant themes accurately, empathically, and in some depth. My goal is to enable readers with widely varying responses to the call of religion to understand their own responses more fully and to appreciate that they can understand as well the beliefs and practices of others, without having to validate or endorse them.

My premise is that the ways in which many of us think about questions of moral and legal obligation, and about our own unfolding careers, are related to our religious or spiritual consciousness. The book was conceived to provide a context in which to explore the content of that relation by reading and thinking about the interactions between religion and contested moral questions among colleagues with whom one is united only in the belief that the questions are worth pondering and a (perhaps tentative) willingness to bring something of oneself into the discussion. Some 15 years of teaching in this area have convinced me that the inquiry fills a powerful need and greatly benefits students’ professional development. My hope is that it will prove similarly useful for individual reading and reflection.

The book is not a contribution to the discourse ordinarily suggested by the phrase law and religion, which typically embraces the study of legal issues raised by the diverse manifestations of religion in public life, in particular questions arising under the Religion clauses of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. There is only one case in these readings. My effort is rather to facilitate consideration of questions like these:

– Where do moral imperatives come from, and how do the answers found in religion and in law affect one another?
– What is the significance of the religiously grounded character of a moral norm for our thinking about moral obligation and disputed issues of public policy?
– What are the differences (and similarities) between religious and secular sources of moral norms?
– How can religion’s importance to our legal thinking, and its grounding in (differing) claims of revelation, be honored in a manner that honors too our commitments
Preface

... to pluralism and freedom of conscience and our self-concepts as morally and intellectually responsible agents?

– How can we integrate our religious commitments with our choices in our work lives?

The Summary of Contents provides a general idea of the themes and organization of the book. Each chapter begins with a brief, more specific statement of the burden of each.

The organization and content of the more than 100 (highly edited and carefully focused) selections chosen and the notes accompanying them necessarily manifest particular understandings of the questions and authors considered and the subjectivity of my own judgments. In light of the variety and inherent particularity of religious experiences, the demands of accuracy of portrayal and depth of understanding can only be partially satisfied. Indeed, many would avow the impossibility of succeeding in the effort to which I have set myself. I hope that, in the end, if I have not disproved the truth of that belief, I will not have provided an exhibit in support of it either. I have sought neither to hide nor trumpet my own views, and to avoid the polemics and polarization so prevalent in the field. Where a writing does manifest such qualities, I have used it in the hope of fostering an understanding of the bases of such passion, as well as of the ways in which it energizes (in others) negative responses. I have striven primarily to evoke my readers’ considered judgments rather than to persuade them of the wisdom of mine.

A cautionary thought at the outset: There is no significant word in this arena that is not fraught with contested meanings and does not generate wide-ranging deeply felt associations. I will use the word *religion* to describe outlooks, practices, and beliefs that are experienced as grounded in that which *transcends* the natural world.¹ So, baseball is not, in my lexicon, a religion, no matter how important a role it plays in one’s life; nor is Marxism, utilitarianism, or the philosophy of Ayn Rand, and “worshipping wealth” is not a religion if the term is used in its usual metaphorical sense, although – to take an especially well-known primal account – to forge a lump of gold into the shape of a calf and treat it as having transcendent power would be to engage in a religious practice.

This is not primarily a reference book. I have not introduced citations to the extensive literature further illuminating (and complicating) the questions addressed or pursuing relevant tangents to them. Footnotes are especially sparse, and most elisions are not marked by dots, the inclusion of which is no assurance against distortion of authorial intention and, in my experience, contributes to a significant loss of focus in reading. The curious or skeptical reader can readily consult the source.


For valued encouragement, assistance, and guidance of many kinds and at different stages of this work, I am grateful to Stephanos Bibas, Ron Day, Eric Dillalogue, Marie Failinger, Mike Fitts, Joan Goodman, Emily Hartigan, Seth Kreimer, Jefferson Powell, Carolyn Schodt, David Skeel, and Amy Uelmen.

Howard Lesnick
Philadelphia, PA
July 1, 2009

¹ This “definition” is of course not intended necessarily to govern legal questions, in particular the meaning of the word as it appears in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.