Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism

How can we live together in the midst of our differences? This is one of the most pressing questions of our time. Tolerance has been the bedrock of political liberalism, while proponents of agonistic political thought and radical democracy have sought an answer that allows a deeper celebration of difference. Kristen Deede Johnson describes the move from tolerance to difference, and the accompanying move from epistemology to ontology, within recent political theory. Building on this "ontological turn," in search of a theological answer to the question, she puts Augustine into conversation with recent political theorists and theologians. This theological option enables the Church to envision a way to engage with contemporary political society without losing its own embodied story and practices. It contributes to our broader political imagination by offering a picture of rich engagement between the many different particularities that constitute a pluralist society.

Kristen Deede Johnson is Associate Director of The CrossRoads Project and Assistant Professor of Political Science at Hope College in Holland, Michigan.
Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine

Edited by
Professor Daniel W. Hardy, University of Cambridge

Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine is an important series which aims to engage critically with the traditional doctrines of Christianity, and at the same time to locate and make sense of them within a secular context. Without losing sight of the authority of scripture and the traditions of the Church, the books in this series subject pertinent dogmas and credal statements to careful scrutiny, analysing them in light of the insights of both church and society, and thereby practise theology in the fullest sense of the word.

Titles published in the series
1. Self and Salvation: BeingTransformed
   DAVID F. FORD
2. Realist Christian Theology in a Postmodern Age
   SUE PATTERTSON
3. Trinity and Truth
   BRUCE D. MARSHALL
4. Theology, Music and Time
   JEREMY S. BEGBIE
5. The Bible, Theology, and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus
   R. W. L. MOBERLY
6. Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin
   ALISTAIR MCFADYEN
7. Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology
   NICHOLAS M. HEALY
8. Theology and the Dialogue of Religions
   MICHAEL BARNES, SJ
9. A Political Theology of Nature
   PETER SCOTT
10. Worship As Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity
   GRAHAM HUGHES

11. God, the Mind's Desire: Reference, Reason and Christian Thinking
   PAUL D. JANZ

12. The Creativity of God: World, Eucharist, Reason
   OLIVER DAVIES

13. Theology and the Drama of History
   BEN QUASH

14. Prophecy and Discernment
   R. W. L. MOBERLY

15. Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism: Beyond Tolerance and Difference
   KRISTEN DEEDE JOHNSON

Forthcoming titles in the series

  Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love
  DAVID F. FORD

  Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action and Authorship
  KEVIN J. VANHOOZER

  A Theology of Public Life
  CHARLES T. MATHEWES

  Theology, Society and the Church
  D. W. HARDY
Theology,
Political Theory,
and Pluralism
Beyond Tolerance and Difference

K R I S T E N  D E E D E  J O H N S O N
And as this grain has been gathered from many fields into one loaf and these grapes from many hills into one cup, grant, O Lord, that thy whole Church may soon be gathered from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.
Contents

Acknowledgments x

1 Introduction 1
2 The recent journey of liberal toleration 28
3 Beyond tolerance to difference 82
4 Augustine and the theological turn 140
5 Towards a theology of public conversation 174
6 Conclusion 250

Bibliography 261
Index 273
Acknowledgments

The interdisciplinary nature of this work has provided me with a unique opportunity to see the potential that exists within the academy for different disciplines and scholars to work together, crossing the boundaries of subjects, institutions, and countries. Indeed, this project was only possible because of the generosity of people from different fields of study and institutions who gave unhesitatingly of their time and efforts, sharing their work, reading and discussing my writing, and meeting with me to discuss a variety of related interests. Though these meetings have probably long since disappeared from their memories, their impact is visible in small and large ways within this work. I think particularly of Chuck Mathewes of the University of Virginia and Ed Song, now of Louisiana State University, without whom I would never have found my way clearly through the sprawling terrain of Augustine and John Rawls, respectively. I have in mind as well, from the University of St. Andrews, N. J. Rengger, John Skorupski, Olivier Ruchet, and Emily Raudenbush, and, from elsewhere, William Connolly, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Stephen White, Jim Skillen, Jeanne Heffernan, Stanley Hauerwas, Jeff Polet, and Keith Starkenburg.

I would also like to acknowledge two authors whose books were published after this manuscript was written, but whose work would certainly have influenced the contours of my argument. The careful reader will find mention of these works within these pages, but the mention is small compared to the great ideas and vision cast by them. One is Jeffrey Stout and his Democracy & Tradition, the other Bill Connolly and his most recent book, Pluralism. In the case of the
latter, I now find much more overlap between our concerns and visions than I once did. In the case of the former, the resonances between the two are obvious, as are the differences.

I am grateful to the seminars, institutions, and people who graciously allowed me to present my work to them and furthered it through their own comments and concerns. I think particularly of the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts and the theology seminar of St. Mary’s College, Jim Skillen and the Civitas Scholars of the summer of 2002, and the Center for Religion and Democracy of the University of Virginia. The support that has been given to me through the Center for Religion and Democracy and the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, also of the University of Virginia – financially, intellectually, collegially, and otherwise – has made this project possible. I am especially thankful for the able leadership provided by James Davison Hunter, whose own work, vision, and life have been among the most shaping influences on my own.

To those who have been directly involved in this project, I owe a special word of thanks. First, a large thankyou goes to the Rotary Club of Bailey’s CrossRoads and to Rotary International, for their generous financial support that enabled me to go to St. Andrews, find fruitful conversation partners and wise teachers, and begin this work. One of those wise teachers was Alan Torrance, whose approach to theology has influenced my own more than he knows. Another was Michael Partridge, who Michael Partridge valiantly stepped in to provide much-needed wisdom and knowledge in areas unfamiliar to me and, with his characteristic generosity, stayed on to walk alongside me through every stage of this work. When David Fergusson and Mark Elliott they raised important questions that, without a doubt, helped examined this as a doctoral thesis my argument to become more focused. Finally, to Trevor Hart, who through the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts has created an intellectual conversation space that has fostered and sharpened the thinking of all who have been involved in it, I am particularly indebted. The shape of this work owes much to our conversations, and his concern for our Church and our culture has played no small part in directing mine.

From our initial contact all the way through to the final stages of manuscript preparation, Kate Brett of Cambridge University Press
has never failed to respond to my queries quickly and thoroughly, providing much-needed direction (and a few interesting family stories) along the way. I am very grateful for her patience, and that of the other editors with whom I communicated, as I found my way into the world of book publishing. Dan Hardy has likewise offered welcome support and constructive insight as this moved through its editorial stages, and I am deeply appreciative of his interest in making this book a part of his series. I have learned much from other books in this series, and I am honored to be a part of it. I would also like to thank my anonymous reader whose encouragement and comments both buoyed and directed me in the final revisions. I owe a great debt as well to Lisa Walcott, who valiantly and generously created my cover illustration at the eleventh hour.

A final word of thanksgiving goes to those who have lived and prayed with me throughout the research and writing that have gone into this piece of work. Much in my life has changed in the years since I began this project, but at each stage I have received unfailing support from family and friends near and far. To all those with whom I have shared homes, offices, conversations, and life, I am more grateful than words can express. To the one who has most recently shared with me not only his home and his life but also his family and his name, I am overwhelmingly thankful. Without Trygve’s unfailing belief in and grace towards me, I cannot imagine how I would have come to the end of this journey. May we be only at the beginning of our own. And finally to my parents, Elka and Peter Deede, who have believed in me and supported me not only during this project but throughout my life. It is with thanksgiving for your love and faithfulness that I dedicate this to you.