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*Politics, Theology and History* is a major new book by a prominent academic and an active politician. It ranges widely across the disciplines of theology, political theory and philosophy and poses acute questions about the basic moral foundations of liberal societies.

Lord Plant focuses on the role that religious belief can and ought to play in argument about public policy in a pluralistic society. He examines the potential political implications of Christian belief and the ways in which it may be deployed in political debate. The book is a contribution to the modern debate about the moral pluralism of western liberal societies, discussing the place of religious belief in the formation of policy and asking what sorts of issues in modern society might be the legitimate objects of a Christian social and political concern.

Raymond Plant has written an important study of the relationship between religion and politics which will be of value to students, academics, politicians, church professionals, policy makers and all concerned with the moral fabric of contemporary life.

RAYMOND PLANT is Professor of European Political Thought at the University of Southampton and a Member of the House of Lords. He was a Home affairs spokesman for the Labour Party from 1992 to 1996, and Master of St Catherine's College, Oxford, from 1994 to 2000. Lord Plant's main publications are *Social and Moral Theory in Casework* (1970), *Community and Ideology: An Essay in Applied Moral Philosophy* (1974), *Hegel* (1974), *Political Philosophy and Social Welfare* (with H. Lesser and P. Taylor-Gooby, 1979), *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship* (with A. Vincent, 1983), *Hegel: Second Edition* (1983) and *Modern Political Thought* (1994).

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# POLITICS, THEOLOGY AND HISTORY

RAYMOND PLANT

*University of Southampton  
Honorary Fellow of St Catherine's College, Oxford*



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*To*  
*The Master and Fellows*  
*St Catherine's College*  
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We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.  
2 Chronicles 20.12.

World remains World. But God is God  
Karl Barth, *Kriegszeit und Gottesreich*

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## *Preface*

A good deal of modern political theory in recent years has been dominated by issues to do with liberalism, pluralism and the claims of community. The present book aims to be a contribution to that debate. It does, however, come to the issues in an indirect way. Most of the current literature is written in a rather abstract way and leads to conclusions of a rather general sort about the place of moral communities, such as those of religious believers, within a liberal society. This book starts in the opposite direction. It looks at the idea that religious belief, in this case Christian belief, has clear implications for the nature and organisation of society and politics, and goes on to look at how all of these ideas relate to the politics of a liberal society. It therefore tries to answer three questions:

What, if any, are the social and political implications of Christian belief?

If there are such implications, to which aspects of modern society do they relate?

What role, if any, should such beliefs play in the policies of a liberal society?

The book aims, therefore, to be part of a modern debate about the relationship between liberalism and moral and religious pluralism.

The book has had a very long period of gestation and has been through many drafts written for different audiences. I first thought about the project in the late 1980s and since then I have been fortunate enough to be asked to give various series of lectures which have allowed me to focus more clearly upon my concerns. So the present book brings together the following:

The Stanton Lectures in the Philosophy of Religion at Cambridge University 1989–1991; The Sarum Lectures at Oxford University in Hilary Term 1991; the Samuel Ferguson Lectures at the University of Manchester in 1993; the Scott Holland Lectures at Manchester Cathedral in 1994; the Gore Lecture at Westminster Abbey and Birmingham Cathedral in 1996; the R. H. Tawney Lecture in London in 1999; the Eleanor Rathbone Memorial Lecture at the University of Bristol in 1997; the St George’s House, Windsor Castle Lecture in 1997 and the John Baillie Lecture at Edinburgh University in 1996. I am pleased to thank the various electoral boards and trustees of these lectures and institutions for inviting me to give them and for the incentive they provided to reflect upon my rather zigzagging approach to these problems.

I should also like to thank St John’s College and Jesus College, Cambridge for hospitality during my tenure of the Stanton Lectureship, and Christchurch, Oxford for hospitality during my tenure of the Sarum Lectureship. I am also indebted to Harris Manchester College, Oxford, of which I am pleased to be an Honorary Fellow, for the use of its library. Thanks are also due to Sally Collins, Librarian of St Catherine’s College, Oxford, for help in tracking down arcane materials.

As a non-theologian, whose reading in theology has been sporadic and ill disciplined, I owe a number of people great debts for intellectual help: Professor Nicholas Lash, Bishop Steven Sykes and Professor Nicholas Sagovsky in Cambridge; Professor O. and Dr J. O’Donovan, Professor M. Wiles, the Rt. Revd Rowan Williams and the Very Revd John Drury at Christchurch; John Lucas at Merton College and Dr Ernest Nicholson Provost of Oriel in Oxford; members of the DASH group and in particular the late David Nicholls; Professor John Haldane of St Andrew’s University who gave me some of his writings; and Brendan McLaughlin at St Catherine’s College who put me right about Prudentius. Special thanks are also due to Professor Duncan Forrester and Professor David Pailin who invited me to lecture at Edinburgh and Manchester Universities respectively and who have been friends and intellectual guides of many years standing. I would also like to thank Professor

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Ronald Preston and Canon John Atherton who have taken an interest in this book during its evolution.

I also acknowledge a debt to the late Fr. J. Westmoreland and to the late Fr. K. Richardson of St Augustine's Anglican church in Grimsby, who taught me most of what I know about Christian belief and whose own faith was uncluttered by the doubts and complexities which form the substance of this book. Fr. Westmoreland gave me a book on Goethe when I was about thirteen and created an interest in continental thought during the *Goethezeit* which has stayed with me ever since and which makes intermittent appearances in the book.

During the main period of writing this book I was Master of St Catherine's College, Oxford and I have been pleased that I have been able to finish it before demitting office at the end of 1999. I owe an enormous debt to my two secretaries Margaret Lavercombe and Judith Arneil who not only typed the book but also balanced the frantic pressures of a life divided between academic work, administration and politics. Without them the book would never have been completed. I would also like to thank Jane Parker, my secretary in Southampton, for her enormous help in the final stages. I have also been much helped by Gillian Maude who copy-edited the manuscript for Cambridge University Press.

I have to thank my family, and particularly my wife Katherine for her support during an exceptionally busy period in my life: *Wir leben durch die Lieb' allein*. The book is dedicated to all our friends and colleagues at St Catherine's College.