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0521547520 - Politics as a Christian Vocation: Faith and Democracy Today

Franklin I. Gamwell

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Politics as a Christian Vocation

Many democratic citizens, including many Christians, think that separation of religion from the state means the exclusion of religious beliefs from the political process. That view is mistaken. Both democracy and Christian faith, this book shows, call all Christians to make their beliefs effective in politics. But the discussion here differs from others. Most have trouble relating religion to democratic discussion and debate because they assume that religious differences cannot be publicly debated. Against this majority view, this book argues that Christian faith belongs in politics because it shares with democracy full commitment to the way of reason. The book then develops ideals of justice and the common good Christians should advocate within the democratic process and shows the difference these ideals make for contemporary politics in the United States, focusing specifically on issues of abortion, affirmative action, and economic distribution.

Franklin I. Gamwell is Shailer Mathews Professor of Religious Ethics, Theology, and Philosophy of Religions at The Divinity School, The University of Chicago, where he has taught since 1979. He is the author of four books, including most recently *Democracy on Purpose: Justice and the Reality of God* (2000).

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2005

Printed in the United States of America

Typeface Palatino 10/13.5 pt. *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Gamwell, Franklin I.
Politics as a Christian vocation : faith and democracy today /
Franklin I. Gamwell.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-83876-2 – ISBN 0-521-54752-0 (pbk.)

1. Christianity and politics. 2. Democracy – Religious aspects –
Christianity. 3. Christianity and justice. I. Title.

BR115.P7G315 2004
261.7-dc22 2004045101

ISBN 0 521 83876 2 hardback
ISBN 0 521 54752 0 paperback

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*To
William Sloane Coffin*

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Preface

This work owes a substantial debt to Protestants for the Common Good, a Chicago-based organization of clergy and laity who seek better to articulate and pursue politics as a Christian vocation. Begun in 1995 in response to perceived injustices in our contemporary public life and the perceived failures of Protestant Christianity to address them adequately, this group has offered me the occasion to reflect on the relation of Christian faith and democracy today. More importantly, the venture has provided a company of Christians whose practical wisdom and commitment to justice have advanced my education. Without the benefit received from their deliberations, including their critical consideration of some things said here, this work would be much the worse. Nothing said here speaks for that organization or any other member of it, and some of my friends there will find ample room for disagreement. But I am deeply grateful for the community Protestants for the Common Good has given me.

I am also indebted to academic colleagues and friends who favored my requests for their help and were generous with their critical proposals for revision: Philip E. Devenish, Larry L. Greenfield, Margaret M. Mitchell, Schubert M. Ogden, and Alexander F. Vishio. In addition, extensive reviews and suggestions were offered by three anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press, all of whom have significantly altered the work. Naturally, none of these people is responsible for the deficiencies in my discussion, and each may think that I have not taken due notice of some comments she or he made. On my accounting, nonetheless, each has improved the work, and to each I express my thanks. I am further grateful to Alex Vishio for his thoughtful preparation of the index.

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This work includes in revised form some paragraphs from papers I have previously published. I have drawn, in Chapter 2, from my essay “Democracy and the Theological Task,” *The Journal of Religion* 82 (July 2002): 349–64; in Chapter 5, from my essay “Politics as a Religious Question,” in *Belonging Together: Faith and Politics in a Relational World*, edited by Douglas Sturm, Claremont, CA: P&F Press, 2003, pp. 31–43; and, in Chapter 6, from my article “Affirmative Action: Is It Democratic?” *The Christian Century* (January 24, 1996): 77–80. I am grateful for permission to use this material.

I take the liberty of dedicating the book to the Reverend William Sloane Coffin, whose witness to the Christian faith has been, far beyond his knowing, profoundly important to me throughout my adult life. I do not imply that he agrees with all I have said, much less that my discussion does justice to his exemplary practice of politics as a Christian vocation. I intend only to express my abiding gratitude and admiration.

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