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978-1-107-02731-2 - The Mighty and the Almighty: An Essay in Political Theology

Nicholas Wolterstorff

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## THE MIGHTY AND THE ALMIGHTY

For a century or more, political theology has been in decline. Recent years, however, have seen increasing interest not only in how church and state should be related, but in the relation between divine authority and political authority, and in what religion has to say about the limits of state authority and the grounds of political obedience. In this book, Nicholas Wolterstorff addresses this whole complex of issues. He takes account of traditional answers to these questions, but on every point stakes out new positions. Wolterstorff offers a fresh theological defense of liberal democracy, argues that the traditional doctrine of “two rules” should be rejected, and offers a fresh exegesis of Romans 13, the canonical biblical passage for the tradition of Christian political theology. This book provides useful discussion for scholars and students of political theology, law and religion, philosophy of religion, and social ethics.

NICHOLAS WOLTERSTORFF is Noah Porter Professor Emeritus of Philosophical Theology at Yale University, and Senior Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, University of Virginia. He is author of several publications, including *Divine Discourse* (Cambridge, 1995), *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge, 1996), *Practices of Belief* (ed. Terence Cuneo, Cambridge, 2010), and *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (2010).

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## Acknowledgments

I was invited to deliver the Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1998, the centenary of the delivery of the lectures by the Dutch neo-Calvinist politician and theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920). The project Kuyper set for himself in his lectures was to articulate the “essence” of Calvinism and point to the contribution of Calvinism to various aspects of the modern world.<sup>1</sup> The title of his third lecture was “Calvinism and Politics.” In this lecture he offered an imaginative and provocative theological account of political authority. I decided to honor the centenary by reflecting anew on the relation between divine and political authority, incorporating into my discussion some reflections on what Kuyper had to say on the topic.

I was not happy with the lectures in the form in which I delivered them; so rather than preparing them for publication, I set them aside. Every now and then in subsequent years I returned to them, reorganized them, revised some passages, developed some points more fully, and so forth; but each time I once again found myself unhappy with the result. It was the stimulus provided by my participation in the McDonald Project on Christian Jurisprudence, led by Frank Alexander and John Witte of the Law School of Emory University, that made me take up the project yet one more time; otherwise I would have discarded it as a good idea that didn’t work out. I thank Alexander and Witte, along with the participants in that Project, for their provocations; and I thank the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary for the honor of their inviting me to deliver the Stone Lectures on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Kuyper’s delivering them.

I am currently a Senior Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia. I warmly thank the Institute for the extremely pleasant environment it provides for thinking, reading, and writing, and for its financial support. My writing was also supported, when I was a Senior Fellow of the Center for the Study of Law and

<sup>1</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism: The Stone Lectures for 1898–1899* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., n.d.).

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My title, *The Mighty and the Almighty*, is not original with me. It's the title of a lecture that Madeleine Albright gave at Yale University and that she subsequently used as the title of a book in which she expanded her lecture. I have no idea whether it was original with her.

Finally, I thank Terence Cuneo, Chris Eberle, Miroslav Volf, and Kevin Vallier for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts of the essay. The flaws that remain are to be laid at my door.