

## Editorial note

Joshua Hordern and Eric Gregory

A set of papers form part of this issue of *Studies in Christian Ethics* under the title 'Christianity and the Liberal Political Tradition'. They emerge from The Oxford-Princeton Seminar in Christian Ethics which has been ongoing since 2022. The seminar followed conversation between graduate students and Faculty from both Oxford University and Princeton University which expressed a desire to gather to read and study together. Our foci have been (i) texts drawn from the long tradition of Christian political thought which Oliver and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan assembled in *From Irenaeus to Grotius* (Eerdmans, 1999) and (ii) monographs by living theologians and philosophers which in some way interact with the classical sources or themes which emerge from that tradition and which also provide a vantage point on present-day moral and political concerns. For example, the seminar has considered Kevin Vallier's *All the Kingdoms of the World: On Radical Religious Alternatives to Liberalism* (Oxford, 2023) and Ephraim Radner's *Mortal Goods: Reimagining Christian Political Duty* (Baker Academic, 2024).

In the case of this set of papers, the monograph which inspired our conversation was Joan Lockwood O'Donovan's *English Public Theology: A Reformation Response to the Crisis of Natural Rights* (T&T Clark, 2023). This book performs a remarkable exercise in the retrieval of sources and concepts vital to public theology, conceived in the manner which O'Donovan explains. Her work invites theologians today to renew or begin their acquaintance with the theology of early Anglican divines, to develop theological alternatives to what she calls 'liberal natural rights' and, more generally, to pay attention to the 'the *intrinsically public character* of the church's evangelical practices and ministries.' (p.252) O'Donovan's own paper, laying out her thinking on these matters and more besides, was originally given as a Recollection Lecture at Pusey House in Oxford in June 2024. We wish to acknowledge with sincere thanks the hospitality of Pusey House, and especially George Westhaver, who has done so much to cultivate such a scholarly and prayerful environment in which to carry out research.

Each of papers which follow in this collection responds variously, both appreciatively and critically, to O'Donovan's invitation, but each also strikes out in its own direction. Eric Gregory responds directly to O'Donovan's paper, identifying a number of theological issues for conversation, concluding with an invitation to consider the practical significance of O'Donovan work, including for Christian nationalism. Johnny Walker's paper considers O'Donovan's work in relation to the French Catholic political philosopher

Pierre Manent, Eckhart Chan invites comparison with alternative genealogies of human rights offered by Nicholas Wolterstorff and Hans Joas, and Enoch Kuo places O'Donovan in critical dialogue with a reconstructed Calvinist Presbyterian position. A colloquium which accompanied the Recollection Lecture was the setting where many of these papers were first considered, during which both Oliver and Joan O'Donovan were present. This conversational tone is reflected in Joan O'Donovan's responses to each of these four papers. She concludes with a response to Eric Gregory's Augustinian comments on establishment and Christian nationalism. In the final paper, Joshua Hordern takes up this thread of conversation but sets it in the context of a striking feature of her account of evangelical public authority, which is her use of the term 'command'. That which we learn of affections and the gospel in O'Donovan's thought, and its significance for social institutions and for evangelical affective culture is then the basis for some remarks on ways to construe Christian nationalism and the vestiges of establishment with respect to the vocation of the Church of England.

We are delighted to acknowledge the McDonald Agape Foundation who so generously endowed the McDonald Centre for Theology, Ethics and Public Life at the University of Oxford. The in-person colloquium which provided the congenial context in which these papers were developed was made possible by the funds proceeding from this endowment. As former interim Director of the Centre (2024-2025), Joshua Hordern expresses particular thanks to the board of McDonald Agape Foundation for their support. Eric Gregory also acknowledges the generous support of the Princeton Department of Religion and University Center for Human Values. We are grateful to Philip Ziegler and the editorial board of *Studies in Christian Ethics* for the opportunity to see these papers published together here.