

political matters there is perhaps too ready an identification of liberal democracy with Christianity (and of Locke's thought as a "Christian" natural law theory) in the closing chapters. However, given the great alternatives of the last century—various forms of totalitarian government—this is an understandable move. It is to be hoped that Forster will develop this general material into more detailed studies in the future and unpack important nuances that *The Contested Public Square* could not explore.

—David VanDrunen

*Westminster Seminary California, Escondido*

## The End of Secularism

**Hunter Baker**

Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2009 (224 pages)

There is much to admire in Hunter Baker's slender but ambitious book, *The End of Secularism*. Baker breezily covers a lot of ground, synthesizing a great deal of analysis and argumentation in a variety of fields, including the history of political philosophy, contemporary legal and political theory, constitutional law, American religious history, the sociology of religion, and the history and philosophy of science, all in service of his central claim that secularism—the assertion that public discourse is healthier when conducted without reference to religion—is “not neutral” (193).

Those familiar with the critique of secularism, as carried out by Nicholas Wolterstorff, Paul Weithman, Kenneth Craycraft, the late Richard John Neuhaus, Steven D. Smith, and Stephen L. Carter, among others, will find little that is altogether new in Baker's book. Like his predecessors, Baker contends that the attempt to depict religious claims as uniquely contentious and uniquely inaccessible to a wider democratic public fails on a variety of grounds. Like his predecessors, Baker convincingly shows the partisanship of a supposedly neutral “view from nowhere.” Rather than being able evenhandedly to accommodate the whole range of worldviews, secularism is itself a worldview with a nonneutral agenda, aiming to displace any and all previously authoritative religious positions.

What distinguishes Baker's treatment from those of the authors mentioned above is, above all, its scope. Rather than, say, focusing narrowly on the details of contemporary Anglo-American liberal theory, as do responses to John Rawls's concept of “public reason” (which demands of all participants in a liberal polity that they offer their colleagues reasons in principle accessible to everyone and hence independent of particular faith commitments), Baker ranges widely along the horizon, incisively characterizing and commenting on these arguments and many others. Thus, for example, we are treated to a discussion of the relationship between religion and science, where Baker persuasively gives the lie to a popular secularist claim that faith and reason (in particular, Christianity and modern natural science) are necessarily at odds with one another. Those who make such an argument, Baker suggests, are more interested in challenging and

supplanting the cultural authority once enjoyed by Christianity than they are in adequately and accurately characterizing the motives and goals of those who use the scientific method to try to understand nature.

The problem with so short a book that covers so much ground is that specialists are unlikely to be satisfied with Baker's treatments of any particular subject. They will say that there is more to be said, that details and nuances are overlooked, and they will almost always be right about the former and at least occasionally about the latter.

I shall offer two examples from the history of political philosophy, which happens to be my specialty. In his discussion of the philosophical responses to the religious pluralism occasioned by the Reformation, Baker devotes less than two pages to John Locke, a central figure for the Anglo-American world. Baker understands Locke as "a Christian writer living in a divided Christendom" (49); while the latter part of the statement is surely indisputable, the former part—that Locke is a Christian—is a matter of great scholarly controversy that has generated a substantial literature, to which Baker does not even devote a footnote. He is surely aware of the controversy and might respond that it would detract from his principal purpose to devote any attention to it. If Locke is not a Christian and advocates toleration, not so much to enable Christians with different theological understandings to live together peaceably but rather to reconstruct Christianity to emphasize liberty over responsibility and private devotion over any sort of cultural or political self-assertion, then our understanding of the history of secularism would surely be different from the one Baker offers us. Furthermore, the secularist project would be much more deeply embedded in the history of Christianity and much more a source of tensions within Christianity than Baker indicates.

I am prepared to make a similar argument about the role that political philosophy plays in the theoretical origins of modern natural science. Baker is surely correct when he observes that it is possible to study nature, in effect, to glorify God. It is at least arguable, however, that Francis Bacon, one of the theoretical founders of modern natural science, had something else in mind: the essentially limitless extension of human power. The scientific method, intended to make nature answer our questions and to construct or reconstruct an order of causality that enables us to create effects as we please, is more clearly intended to empower humanity than to glorify God, to remake the world in accordance with our interests than to find our divinely ordained place in Creation. I do not mean to suggest that every contemporary scientist is a Faust but rather only that at the very heart of modern natural science may be a bias in favor of a worldview that really leaves no place for a Creator other than man.

In offering these necessarily all-too-brief observations, I do not mean to detract from the value of Baker's undertaking. He argues that the best alternative to secularism as a response to the religious diversity inherent in modernity is a genuine embrace of pluralism, where we learn practically to get along with one another as we express ourselves honestly and respectfully in the public square. That he is not the first person to have written a book urging us down this path suggests that it, like the secularism he rightly and incisively criticizes, is a *project* that requires serious attention and superintendence.

That the circumstances in which he urges us to undertake this project are in part and at the deepest levels informed by ideas arguably inimical to the religious elements of our contemporary pluralism suggests that this is no small undertaking.

Let us hope that Baker continues to urge us down this path and that he finds the time to delve still more deeply into the roots of our predicament. This book offers a promising beginning to “the end of secularism” but can hardly be said to be the last word.

—Joseph M. Knippenberg  
*Oglethorpe University, Atlanta, Georgia*

## Neither Beast Nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person

**Gilbert Meilaender**

New York: Encounter Books, 2009 (118 pages)

By all accounts, Gilbert Meilaender, the Richard and Phyllis Duesenberg Professor of Ethics in the Department of Theology at Valparaiso University, is a heavyweight in his field. With over a dozen books published in theological ethics, Meilaender has been a key voice for Christians in both the academy and the culture wars for a quarter-century. From 2002–2009, he was a member of the Bush administration’s *President’s Council on Bioethics* (PCBE). Together with Edmund Pellegrino, Leon Kass, William Hurlbut, and Robert George, Meilaender faithfully brought to bear the sane and salubrious truths of the Judeo-Christian ethical tradition on a wide range of complex issues. He established a name for himself in bioethics with the publication of his *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians* (1996; 2nd ed., 2005). Although his prominence as a public intellectual elevated by his association with the PCBE, Meilaender is in the first place a theologian, a Christian ethicist. Because bioethics raises issues fundamental to human existence, about life and death, flourishing and suffering, enhancement and alteration—questions in the end that are decidedly theological—Meilaender is well situated to make a contribution.

In *Neither Beast Nor God*, Meilaender works out ideas that he began formulating for a volume of essays commissioned by the PCBE entitled *Human Dignity and Bioethics*. The council was challenged by critics of the concept of dignity to articulate a substantive definition for the term. In a now-famous 2003 editorial in the *British Medical Journal*, “Dignity Is a Useless Concept,” bioethicist Ruth Macklin excoriates the council for throwing the term *dignity* around without ever defining it. In Macklin’s judgment, the concept is useless, because it covers no ethical ground not already covered by the principle of autonomy.

Meilaender disagrees. His guiding thesis in *Neither Beast Nor God* is that the language of dignity functions as a proxy concept—a placeholder—for a larger concept of the human person that includes truths embedded in human nature that both positively define and limit what is humanly good and fulfilling.