

Theo Hobson

Born 1972. Writer and artist.

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1. Introduction

This introduction was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from Wikipedia.

Theo Hobson is a British theologian. He was educated at St Paul's School in London; he read English literature at the University of York, then theology at the University of Cambridge, where he was a member of Hughes Hall. He focused on the strongest voices of the Protestant tradition: Martin Luther, Søren Kierkegaard, and Karl Barth. His PhD thesis became the basis of his first book, *The Rhetorical Word: Protestant Theology and the Rhetoric of Authority* (2002), a study of the role of authoritative rhetoric in Protestantism.

He gradually turned his attention to ecclesiology. His next book was *Against Establishment: An Anglican Polemic* (2003). In this book he announced that the Church of England was doomed, and that he considered himself a "post-Anglican". His third book is *Anarchy, Church and Utopia: Rowan Williams on the Church* (2005), a critique of the archbishop's ecclesiology and perhaps of all ecclesiology. He has written for various journals and newspapers including *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Spectator*, and *The Tablet*.

His principal interests are the relationship between Protestantism and secularism, which he believes is more positive than is generally understood; the relationship between theology and literature; and the post-ecclesial renewal of worship. He thinks that large-scale carnival-style celebration must replace church worship. He lives in Harlesden, London, and is married with three children.

Hobson has argued that although there is an instinctive mistrust of spectacle in the Protestant church, Catholic-style theatricality is an essential part of religion.

In his 2013 book *Reinventing Liberal Christianity* it is proposed that it is possible to be a political and secular liberal that avoids the truth claims of Christianity while retaining the cultus.

2. Biography

The following note was contributed by Theo Hobson in April 2022. To read more about his theology and to see some of his art, visit theohobson.com.

Theo Hobson is a British theologian and journalist. He has written extensively on the Church of England, the history of ideas, Christianity's relationship with modern political thought, and the role of ritual. His work is centred around two big ideas.

First, we must affirm Christianity's positive relationship with liberal politics. The liberal state is part of God's plan. The alternative is a reactionary theology that idealises some form of theocracy. This does not mean that 'liberal theology' is all good - one form of it has been guilty of diluting Christianity with rational humanism. We need a new liberal theology that focuses on the good of the liberal state, and guards against the erosion of orthodoxy.

Second, we must develop new forms of Christian culture, alongside traditional church worship. Modern Protestantism has generally neglected Christianity's ritual basis; it must develop a culture of public celebration inspired by medieval festivity. As well as writing about this, Theo has tried to start the ball rolling, through making religious art with a ritual aspect.

Theo was educated at St Paul's School in London. He found the school's Christian Union inspiring at first, then theologically limited. He started exploring liberal Protestant thought, but his chief love was English literature, which he read at the University of York. But, while an undergraduate, theology re-surfaced as his chief intellectual interest; initially he was drawn to religious socialism. He then studied theology at the University of Cambridge. He focused on the strongest voices of the Protestant tradition: Martin Luther, Søren Kierkegaard, and Karl Barth. He witnessed the emergence of 'radical orthodoxy', a boldly neo-traditionalist movement led by John Milbank, but was not in sympathy with its emphasis on philosophical theology, or its disparagement of liberal politics.

His PhD thesis became the basis of his first book, *The Rhetorical Word: Protestant Theology and the Rhetoric of Authority* (2002), a study of the role of authoritative rhetoric in Protestantism. By now he was back in London, working as a copywriter, and had started to get a few articles published in the national press.

Prompted by the horror of 9/11, he paid new attention to theopolitics (the relationship of religion and politics), and was persuaded of the need to separate church and state. This led to a short book: *Against Establishment: An Anglican Polemic* (2003). He soon wrote another short book on the

theology of the new archbishop of Canterbury: *Anarchy, Church and Utopia: Rowan Williams on Church* (2005).

In these years he was semi-detached from the Church of England, a sort of ecclesial ‘seeker’, exploring the possibility of a new sort of post-institutional Christian culture. He had become fascinated by ritual, but not quite in the normal high-church way. Instead he was drawn to the idea of religious ritual as a basic or ‘primitive’ form of culture that underlies all the arts. He continued his exploration of theopolitics with a study of Milton. *Milton’s Vision: the Birth of Christian Liberty* (2008) argues that the liberal Puritans of the civil war era were the key founders of modern politics. And it was Milton above all who set out a vision of the godly liberal state replacing theocracy. He also wrote a play about Milton, *Milton in Person*, performed at his (and Milton’s) old school.

He then wrote a short book called *Faith* (2009). It was partly concerned to explain Luther’s notion of faith as an internal argument, in which the presence of doubt must be acknowledged.

In 2010 he moved to New York for a few years. The distance from England allowed him to get over his difficulties with Anglicanism, and he became more fully affirmative of traditional church worship, though he remained interested in fostering a more celebratory public culture on the fringes of church.

In his 2013 book *Reinventing Liberal Christianity* was published. It sets out his nuanced view of liberal Protestantism. It is a mix of good (its affirmation of the liberal state) and bad (support for the rational-humanist ‘reform’ of Christianity, and neglect of the primacy of faith and ritual). The good and bad strands were deeply intertwined and so when the reaction came, through Kierkegaard, Barth and others, the baby was thrown out with the bathwater. We must rediscover the good side of liberal Protestantism and address its ritual deficiency: a ‘cultic-liberal’ approach. The book includes criticism of the dominant trend in theology: neo-orthodox disparagement of political liberalism.

Back in Britain, he wrote another book about the history of religious ideas, more accessible to non-theologians. *God Created Humanism: The Christian Basis of Secular Values* (2017) shows how liberal values are rooted in Christian, especially Protestant, culture. The moral universalism of the West, typified by human rights, is not natural or rational but arises from religion. It explains that Christians should affirm the liberal state as the proper context for Christianity - despite its secularism. This dialectical approach is the liberal Christian alternative to unitary theopolitics. The final chapter returns to the idea of faith as an internal argument.

By now his interest in religious art was central to his work, and had a practical side. He made some art-works and performances for local churches and spent a year as a fine-art student, mostly making sculptures. He continued to argue that new cultic events were needed, ideally on a large scale - meanwhile he created a few performances for churches and schools. He continued to write religious journalism, and for a while was a regular voice on Thought For the Day.

In 2022, partly prompted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, he restated his theopolitical position with new clarity in various articles. He criticised the disparagement of liberal politics that has dominated theology, and urged Christians to affirm the sacred worth of the liberal state. This is the conclusion of an article published in The Tablet (April 8):

Might the grief and suffering caused by Putin's war jolt theology from this dead-end? His aggression is clearly rooted in a theocratic vision, and a hatred of the liberal state. Should this not give our brainy postliberals pause? Should it not lead Christians to reflect on the sacred worth of the liberal state? Yes, the sacred worth. For it is no secondary matter, that people should be free from tyranny, that people should live in states that respect human rights and freedoms. Liberal democracy is not the realisation of the kingdom, any more than it is the "end of history", but it is a major expression, or outworking, of the Christian gospel, of the Spirit in human history. And it involves the rejection of the old theocratic model of religion and politics, the old ideal of their unity.

Some argue for a sort of neutrality: liberal democracy is the least worst form of government, but to affirm it too strongly is idolatrous. But this just allows the reactionary view that liberalism is a threat to religion to gain ground. The liberal state is largely secular - so how can it be seen as holy? Well, liberal Christians believe that we must accept a tension, or dialectic, between the secular shared public ideology of liberalism, and Christianity. The dream of theopolitical harmony must be renounced, until God brings his kingdom. This is not a sell-out to a secular ideology, for the liberal state has Christian roots. It echoes the kenosis of Christ.

The Church of England, as you might expect, is wonderfully on the fence. It is the established church of a liberal state - which commits it both to the old order of established churches, and the new order of affirming liberal democracy. Until recently it seemed to downplay the former, and accentuate the latter. Now, who knows? Has its attachment to liberal democracy weakened? No, but it has become harder to voice, with so much of the most influential theology of the past thirty years pointing in the other direction. It is time to articulate the Church's positive link with the liberal state, with unprecedented clarity.

3. Books

Theo Hobson has authored the following book. Each is described in more detail below.

The Rhetorical Word: Protestant Theology and the Rhetoric of Authority. Aldershot, England: Ashgate. 2002.

Against Establishment: An Anglican Polemic. London: Darton, Longman & Todd. 2003.

Anarchy, Church and Utopia: Rowan Williams on the Church. London: Darton, Longman & Todd. 2005.

Milton's Vision: The Birth of Christian Liberty. London: Continuum. 2008.

Faith. Durham, England: Acumen Publishing. 2009.

Reinventing Liberal Christianity. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 2013.

God Created Humanism: The Christian Basis of Secular Values. London: SPCK Publishing. 2017.

The Rhetorical Word: Protestant Theology and the Rhetoric of Authority

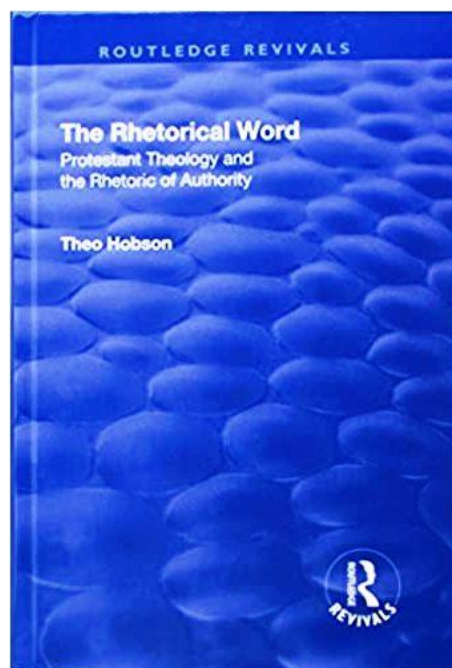
Routledge, the publishers of this book in 2002, describe it thus:

This book offers a bold reading of Protestant tradition from a rhetorical and literary perspective. Arguing that Protestant thought is based in a rhetorical performance of authority.

Hobson draws on a wide range of modern and postmodern thought to defend this account of rhetorical authority from various charges of authoritarianism.

With close readings of Augustine, Luther, Kierkegaard and Barth, this book develops a new 'rhetorical theology of the Word' and also a new critique of secular modernity, with particular reference to modern literature and the thought of Nietzsche.

Confronting the related issues of rhetoric and authority, Hobson provides a provocative account of modern theology



which offers new perspectives on theology's relationship to literature and postmodern thought.

Against Establishment: An Anglican Polemic

This book, published in 2003, is described by its publisher thus:

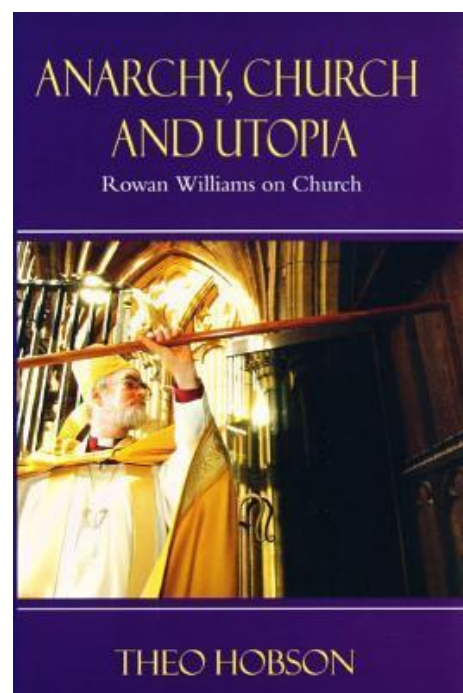
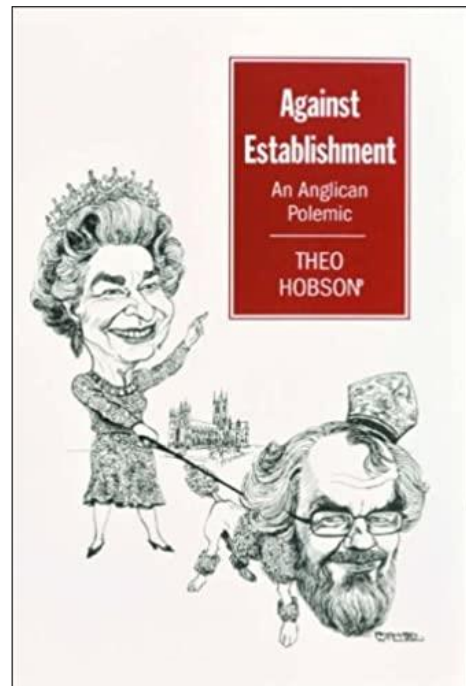
'The Church of England is locked in a terrible, terrible dilemma. It has depended on establishment for its unity, its coherence, its order, its identity. But now establishment is draining it of its vitality, its credibility ... the Church, as it is presently constituted, is a sinking ship.'

Against Establishment is a brilliant broadside against the establishment of the Church of England from a writer recognised as one of the most interesting, provocative and entertaining commentators on religious affairs. Theo Hobson tells the story of establishment since the Reformation with irresistible verve, and attacks a variety of defenders of establishment (including T. S. Eliot and C. S. Lewis) before critically examining the position of Rowan Williams. Hobson's engaging and accessible polemic is firmly rooted in the Protestant tradition of strong speaking. His core contention that establishment is a betrayal of the gospel gives his passionate manifesto echoes of Luther's denunciation of Rome or Kierkegaard's of Christendom.

Anarchy, Church and Utopia: Rowan Williams on the Church

This book, which was published in 2005 by Darton, Longman and Todd, is described thus on the Goodreads website:

A brilliant, short, sharp study of the ecclesiology of Rowan Williams. Hobson examines the development of Williams' theology and argues that his account of the church is so open, so self-critical, so idealistically Christo-centric and so post-modern that it is questionable whether the



traditional institutional structures can survive it. Beneath the apparent orthodoxy, there is a sort of Christian anarchy.

Milton's Vision: The Birth of Christian Liberty

This book, which was published in 2008 by Continuum, is described by its publisher thus:

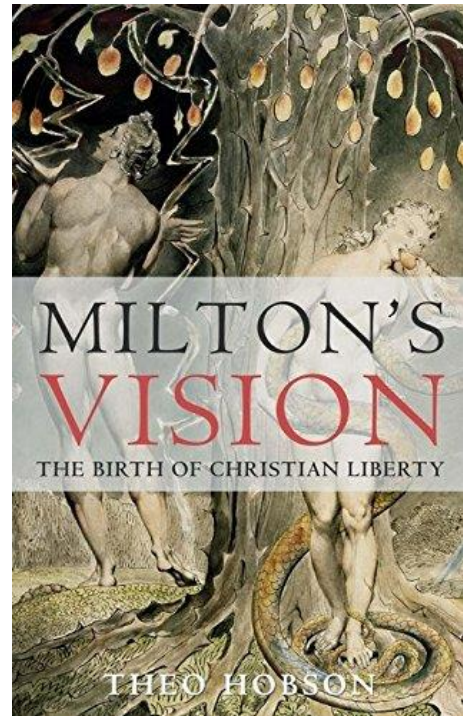
This is an important and invaluable book which through concentrating on Milton's religious vision highlights his relevance to the core issues of our day. No writer is so grudgingly admired. He wrote great poetry, goes the received wisdom, but his creed was narrow, chilling, inhuman. He was a Puritan.

This toxic label implies that he supported an authoritarian form of Protestantism that was intent on imposing itself upon the nation, banning its fun, policing its very thoughts. This says the author is one of the oddest reputations in the entire history of ideas. No contemporary opposed religious authoritarianism with such vehemence. No one was so adamant that political freedom is built into the Christian gospel. This book concentrates on Milton's religious vision and is more concerned with his prose than his poetry. He insisted that Protestantism was compatible with political liberty - that the two causes are complimentary. This was a new vision.

By treating all ecclesiastical authority with suspicion, he helped to establish the modern ideal of secularism. He was a Christian libertarian who wanted every form of church to wither away, so that the Gospel might be completely free of coercion. The book is thus a vital contribution to the debate about the place of religion in public life.

It will appeal to those interested in the history of political thought, especially the concept of liberalism as well all those with an interest in religion and literature. There has never been a study of Milton that highlights his relevance to the core issues of our day: how religion gives rise to and interacts with secular ideals. Milton should be living at this hour. We have need of him.

Review:



'Theo Hobson takes no prisoners in his enthusiasm for Milton. This is a vigorous pen-portrait of one of Protestantism's greatest writers which has the great virtues of taking his Protestantism seriously, and of saying without any hesitation that Milton's Protestantism speaks to the modern Western world as much as it did to the tyrants and tidy-minded ideologues of his own day.' -- Diarmaid MacCulloch, Professor of the History of the Church, Theology Faculty, University of Oxford.

Faith

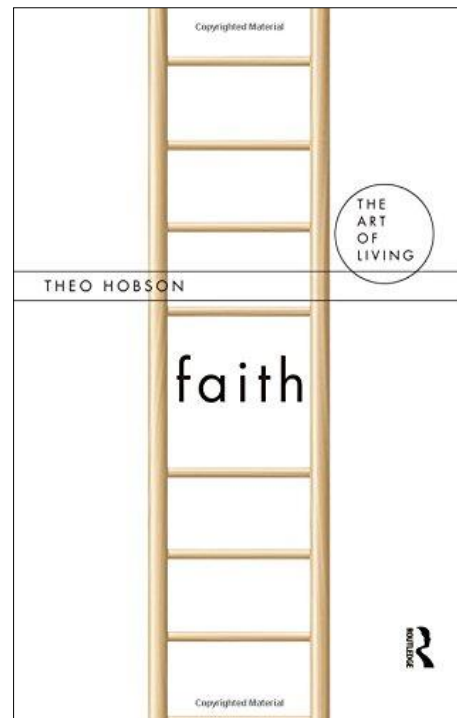
This book, published in 2009 by Acumen Publishing, is described by its publisher thus:

In "Faith", the theologian Theo Hobson explores the notion of faith and the role it plays in our lives. He unpacks the concept to ask whether faith is dependent on religion or whether it is also a general secular phenomenon. In exploring this question Hobson ranges widely over theology, philosophy, politics and psychology and engages with the writings of Christian and atheist thinkers alike.

The book begins by considering attitudes to faith in recent works of atheism. Hobson shows how Richard Dawkins and other writers, while attacking faith in one sense, have exhibited faith in another. The book goes on to explore the wider meaning of faith, including our faith in free-market capitalism, the part faith plays in democratic politics and the role faith has in our psychological well-being. To understand the role of faith in modernity, Hobson argues, we must attend to the specifically Christian concept of faith.

Hobson then returns to the religious meaning of faith by exploring the account of faith in the Bible and charting the tension between faith and reason in Christian thought. The final chapter takes an autobiographical turn and relates how the author came to take faith seriously and to question what Christians are meant to have faith in.

From the Old Testament story of Abraham to the visionary poetry of W. B. Yeats, from the polemics of Luther to the rhetoric of Barack Obama, the author presents us with a fresh and illuminating meditation on the nature of faith. In doing so, he reveals how trust and faith, the religious and secular,



are utterly entwined and how the attraction of religious faith outweighs the intellectual difficulties it presents.

Reinventing Liberal Christianity

This book, published in 2013 by Eerdmans Publishing Company, is described by its publisher thus:

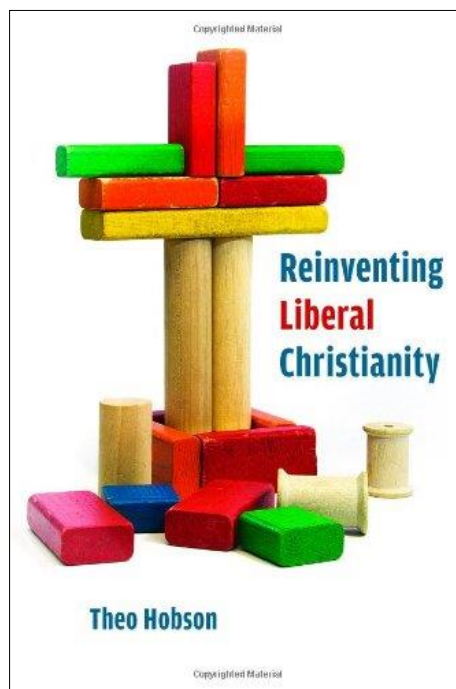
This book argues that there is a good sort of liberal theology, and a bad sort. The good sort's better. It grasps that Christianity is a cultic tradition – ie. rooted in ritual. (The bad sort is too fond of rational humanism, too neglectful of ritual.)

Reviews:

Prof. David Martin: 'Theo Hobson presents a lively, timely, theologically-informed and historically-grounded argument for the compatibility of sacramental Christianity and the traditions of the liberal state.'

Professor Martyn Percy: 'A remarkable, wise, and incisive book'.

Professor Linda Woodhead: 'For Christians who appreciate living in a liberal state and despair at "postliberal" theology's easy dismissal of it, this book is a delight.'



God Created Humanism: The Christian Basis of Secular Values

This book, published by SPCK Publishing in 2017, is described by Theo Hobson thus:

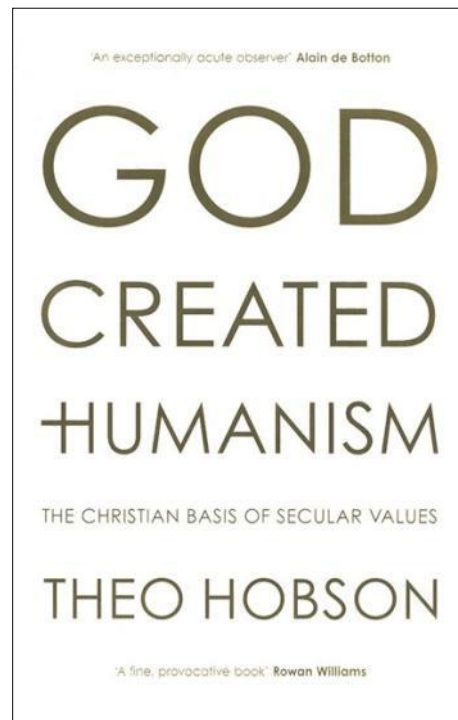
This book sums up most of my theology – especially its theopolitical aspect, ie, how religion relates to politics. It argues that secular humanism is a good thing, and a Christian-rooted thing – the two must necessarily be in dialogue. The final chapter sums up my approach to faith, that it is an internal argument – we are meant to 'half-believe' – for belief is a miracle of the Holy Spirit.

The following review by Nick Spencer is archived, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Church Times of 10th March 2017:

We are slowly losing our amnesia. Thanks to recent tomes — in particular Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* (Harvard, 2007) and Larry Siedentop’s masterly *Inventing the Individual* (Penguin, 2015) — the idea that the modern world was hatched in a smoke-filled room by Voltaire, Kant, and Rousseau is losing to its credibility.

Before the Enlightenment, the West had a history that was marked by more than ignorance, theocratic violence, and industrial-scale witch-burning.

Neither a commitment to equal human dignity (let us call this “humanism”) nor to a state whose legitimacy is grounded in its obligation to administer equal justice under the rule of law (let us call this “secularism”) is natural; neither is an invention of the 18th century. Both rest on deep Christian foundations.



Theo Hobson’s is the latest book to argue this case, which he narrates at a brisk pace and in engaging prose. From the Hebrew prophets, through the New Testament, Christendom, Reformation, Enlightenment, and 19th and 20th centuries, to a slightly longer chapter on where we are now, he tells the tale of how what he calls “secular humanism” came to be our common creed today.

His purpose is polemical rather than purely historical. Believers need to be less hostile to “secular humanism”, he argues, as it is the ideological child to which their faith has given birth; and non-believers need to be less hostile to secular humanism’s Christian roots, not least because, he intimates, it is only those roots that will sustain it in the long run.

The “humanitarian ideals” that mark our time are not natural, nor “rationally deducible”, but the result of “complex cultural traditions, brewed over centuries . . . the main ingredient [of which] was the story of God taking the side, even taking the form, of the powerless victim”.

His case is provocative and well made, though perhaps not aided by his idiosyncratic use of the phrase “secular humanism”, which, idiomatically at least, describes a world-view that affirms humanism on non-religious, usually naturalistic, grounds.

What he means is a commitment to humanism and to (a certain kind of) secularism, both of which do indeed have Christian roots and invite

Christian support. “Secular humanism” may be a concise term, but it obscures rather than clarifies his point.

After taking a well-deserved break around the Millennium, history has resumed business as usual. Where we are going is once again a matter for uncertainty and even a little fear. Answering that will be easier if we understand where we have been, to which Hobson’s book is a helpful contribution.

Other comments on God Created Humanism:

An exceptionally acute observer - Alain de Botton.

A fine provocative book - Rowan Williams.

4. Articles

In addition to his books, Theo Hobson has written many articles for journals, magazines and newspapers, including The Guardian, The Times, The Spectator, and The Tablet. By way of example, the following article by Theo Hobson is archived, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the opendemocracy.net website. It was published on 26th January 2011.

The religious crisis of American liberalism

The extraordinary arc of Barack Obama's popular appeal tells a deeper story of America: of how the relationship between liberalism and religion was forged, then frayed and broken, and how the president's rhetoric offered the mirage of healing. Theo Hobson asks what, if anything, can be recovered from the ashes of a once-potent compact.

During his campaign in 2008, Barack Obama seemed to be doing more than getting himself elected president. He seemed to be launching a revival of liberal idealism, shifting the United States' political landscape in the process. This impression hardly lasted beyond his inauguration as president on 20 January 2009. Never has a national mood of progressive optimism evaporated so fast. The parlous state of the economy doesn't fully explain this: economic turbulence might actually be conducive to forging a new liberal movement, as Franklin D Roosevelt showed in the 1930s.

Maybe, nowadays, liberal idealism is something that can be conjured up at election time, to a greater or lesser extent, but is otherwise dormant. If so, this is an acute problem for liberalism. For its adversary, in the form of the Tea Party movement, has proved itself to be a dynamic populist force, which motivates its followers between elections as well as during them. The only popular American ideology, it has seemed in the last two years, is of the small-tax, anti-government variety.

Alongside campaigning on economic issues, the purpose of the Tea Party has been to expose Obama's rhetoric of hope as inauthentic, even un-American: for here is the site of real popular American idealism. Ours are the real, passionate voices queuing up to demand freedom from state interference. Liberals have no response, except to recoil in distaste. They were excited recipients of Obama's campaigning rhetoric, but lack the ability or inclination to echo this rhetoric themselves, to participate in it. The huge advantage of the right is that every ordinary conservative knows how to hum its tunes: liberals have a more passive relationship to their leaders' rhetoric.

Why is liberalism so much culturally weaker than conservatism? Part of the answer, I suggest, lies in the relationship of liberalism with religion.

An alliance ended

Barack Obama's vision of hope had religious echoes. He boldly presented himself as the heir of the civil-rights movement, which, thanks to Martin Luther King and others, was an expression of liberal Christianity as well as progressive politics. King himself was inspired by the "social gospel" movement that influenced Roosevelt's New Deal.

The American liberal-left in the 20th century had clear links to religion. This overlap goes back to the abolitionist movement: Frederick Douglass was a forerunner of King. Lincoln was more reticent on religion, but powerfully suggested that divine justice was the fuel of the democratic project.

Obama knowingly drew on this tradition, with his impassioned talk of hope. This went much further than the "hope" rhetoric of other politicians; it often referred to the biblical concept of faith - implicitly, of course. He repeatedly characterised his candidacy as "unlikely", and "improbable": as if his career was a reason-defying miracle, as if he were not a normal politician but the amazed witness to God's action, like Abraham or Joseph. It is little exaggeration to say that this prophetic theme gave him the edge over Hillary Clinton, a more experienced politician with very similar policies, and won him the Democratic candidacy, and then the presidency.

He understood that that the liberal vision is most powerful when in touch with its religious roots. Democrats had been routinely wary of pressing these buttons, which can misfire in various ways. Indeed the strategy almost misfired for Obama, thanks to his former pastor Jeremiah Wright.

What enabled him to play the "prophetic" card with such success was the racial element: he could offer himself as a sign of the overcoming of racial division, and therefore a living icon of the liberal Christian vision.

This prophetic rhetoric is admirably rooted in American history, and Obama was a master performer of it. So why did his support melt away?

The problem is that this prophetic tradition, for all its attractiveness, lacks clear roots in contemporary culture. For the cultural overlap of liberalism and religion has been weakening for decades. In a sense the appeal of prophetic hope-rhetoric is nostalgic: it reminds Americans of a previous era of idealism.

In this previous era there was a strong culture of liberal Christianity for politicians such as Woodrow Wilson, FDR, John F Kennedy and Lyndon B Johnson to draw on. The old "mainline" Protestant churches, full of respect for the liberal state, were still very strong. Liberal Protestantism was

America's semi-official creed. This allowed Wilson to rein in the free market, and Roosevelt to implement the New Deal. Accusations that such policies were socialist did not stick, for their architects were clearly pillars of the nation's Protestant establishment (establishment, that is, in the unofficial sense).

Liberal Protestant intellectuals had great cultural respect, into the 1960s. Thinkers such as Reinhold Niebuhr made it seem obvious that America was simultaneously liberal and Christian. The civil-rights movement seemed a new chapter in this story of the expansion of the liberal Christian vision. It still seemed that America was held together by a mild form of "civil religion" (a phrase coined by the sociologist Robert Bellah in 1967). And this civil religion emphasised the common good, and a liberal form of faith.

But in fact things were changing. The culture wars were underway. The fundamentalist strain of American religion revived. And anti-liberalism became central to the Republican Party, first with Nixon's demonising of liberal elitists, then with Reaganomics.

And, perhaps most importantly, the old liberal Protestant consensus was crumbling. From the mid-1960s, the mainline churches began losing members fast: some opted for Evangelicalism, but most drifted away from religion. The most vocal Christians were now those who looked on liberal reforms with suspicion. Moreover, progressive causes had a new "secular" aura, especially with the Supreme Court's verdict on the Roe vs Wade case in 1973.

The old assumption, that America was simultaneously liberal and Christian, was in tatters. The noisiest Christians denounced liberalism, and even implied that the separation of church and state was a misunderstanding. This dynamic has continued ever since: the old alliance of Christianity and liberalism has never been revived.

A recovery project

This is the background to Obama's roller-coaster reception. He implicitly promised to restore the broken relationship between America's religion and its liberal idealism. This appealed to liberals on a deep level. But in reality the old synthesis cannot be restored just like that. There was therefore something pretentious about Obama's campaigning rhetoric. He implied the existence of a latent common faith that just had to be dusted down - but it had in fact been ripped apart by the culture wars. His famous rejection of the division of the country into "red" (Republican) and "blue" (Democrat) states was, in effect, a promise to heal the culture wars. And the reconciliation of liberalism and religion is at the heart of this.

Obama's rhetoric was therefore founded in a profound diagnosis of the nation's inner division. America must end its painful culture wars and reunite around its old-fashioned liberal faith. But such a major cultural shift cannot be effected by a presidential election. Obama was announcing the need for a movement that transcends normal politics. It is hardly surprising that no such cultural shift suddenly became apparent.

And perhaps it is unsurprising that the main practical effect of his election has been anger on the right. The Tea Party movement has ostensibly focused on Obama's economic policies, but much of its rhetorical violence comes from the religious right. What arouses such hatred is Obama's affinity with the old liberal Christianity, his claim that America is founded in a liberal Christian vision. The suggestion that Obama is really a Muslim is a mark of how deeply the religious right fears liberal Christianity: it would rather pretend that it is contending with a different religion, or with atheism. It fears to admit the fact that there is another account of American religion.

But does the old alliance of liberalism and Christianity show any signs of rising from the ashes? No obvious signs: the liberal churches, such as Episcopalianism, remain far weaker than the Evangelical ones. But on the other hand there are signs that Evangelicalism is rethinking. Some of its leaders feel that it was damaged by too close an association with the George W Bush administration.

Many younger Evangelicals, such as the megachurch star Rob Bell, are developing a new, inclusive, socially engaged approach, in which poverty and global warming are taken seriously. The rather vague reform movement called "emerging church", mostly made up of ex-Evangelical liberals, is also on the rise. The old paradigm, of dominance by the religious right, has a few cracks in it that might develop into serious fissures.

Also, the turmoil of the Bush years has led some liberal commentators to see the old culture wars as just too dangerous. The journalist George Packer, for example, argues that liberalism was led astray by arrogant secularism and identity politics; America must rediscover a deeper understanding of its liberal tradition, and the rediscovery of its liberal Christian tradition is a key part of this. Obama was hardly likely to repair America's divided soul single-handed, but his campaigning rhetoric, and the angry reaction of the right, has helped to clarify the question. Can America reject the illiberal religion that has dominated for a generation, and rediscover, on new terms, the old alliance of faith and liberal idealism?

5. Broadcasting



Theo Hobson has contributed several monologues to the 'Thought for the Day' slot on the BBC Radio 4 Today Programme. Each Thought for the Day contribution lasts just under three minutes. By way of example, the following transcription is archived, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Today Programme of 11th October 2018:

So global warming is still a problem. The huge changes that we and other countries have made over the last decades will not be sufficient. A steeper reduction in carbon emissions is needed to limit the warming of the planet. Most of us have been half hoping that some dazzling scientific invention would save us from this Sword of Damocles hovering over our feast, or hoping that the scientific consensus would change, and the whole thing would turn out to be a monster-sized Millennium Bug.

But the experts say on the contrary that we should get ready for some major cultural changes. We will have to take leave of our habitual freedom to consume. Ideally this would be voluntary; people will feel it is wrong to drive so much, fly so much, eat so much. And new attitudes will just replace the old ones, as has largely happened in regard to race, gender and sexuality. But what if most of us remain reluctant environmentalists? The we'll need the government to curtail our freedom.

That would mean a strange new era of politics, in which the state becomes a sort of green nanny. It's possible to imagine this in dystopian terms. Parents denounced by their children for eating the wrong thing, and foreign travel only available to a super-rich elite. And people condemned for thought crimes against the planet. But it's also possible to imagine the shift in more positive terms, as a sort of liberation from the era of excess. Maybe

we will feel more in touch with the natural world, through a new sense of our solidarity with a vulnerable planet.

Admittedly that is pretty difficult to imagine. Our freedom to choose, to be excessive consumers, is a pretty big part of who we are. And our alienation from nature is arguably an insoluble part of being human. Maybe some of us will enjoy a smooth transition to a simpler, green life. But the rest of us will probably hanker for the fleshpots of Egypt.

Some of us will find religion helpful, for it helps us to see beyond the heightened individualism of modernity. Christians might find solace and inspiration in the fact that their central ritual is a celebratory act of eating and drinking in which we eat and drink only a tiny amount. We don't need more than this bare minimum as long as we are sharing it together. For the greatest joy does not come from consumption but from participating in what we see as the most authentic form of culture. Maybe other forms of culture can echo this logic. Maybe we can move towards consuming less, but in more communal and celebratory ways.

6. Art

On his personal website www.theohobson.wordpress.com, Theo Hobson introduces his work as an artist thus:

Art was a sideline in my youth – occasional oil-paintings. Then, as I was completing my doctorate, I suddenly felt the inadequacy of words and ideas, and wanted to be involved in images – and in ritual. For me, art and ritual are basically the same thing. So my desire to be involved in Christian culture has been inseparable from my desire to be a creative artist.

For some years this had a strong polemical aspect: we need new forms of Christian culture, I argued, the normal churchy form being too weak and compromised. I have become more accepting of regular church, as the necessary basis of Christian culture, but still feel that new things are needed on the fringes. And this is how I see my role as a Christian artist: creating new bits of Christian culture that might show people the power of this ritual tradition.

On one hand, this means public art events that are also ritual events. I am currently working on one such project for next Holy Week – watch this space. But on the other hand it means more conventional art making (which I became more involved with through studying Fine Art at Kensington and Chelsea college 2017-18). My art tends to have a strong religious reference and might even have a church setting (I have made many hangings for churches), but it might also seem ironic, questioning of orthodoxy. Seeming-irreverence is a crucial tool for the religious artist.

Shows and Performances

2018: January: Interim show at Kensington and Chelsea College ('Resurrection', 'Be Perfect')

2018: April: 'Sinners', performance for Holy Week, steps of St Paul's cathedral

2018: June: End-of-Year Show at KCC ('Adam and Eve', 'Mother and Child', 'Love')

2018: December: 'After Life' – solo show of skeleton prints, Brompton Cemetery Chapel

2019: 27 April: 'Stick-leg George' – a pageant for St George's Day, St John's church Kensal Green

2019: 4-8 June: 'Affinity', group show, Candid Arts, Islington ('AI')

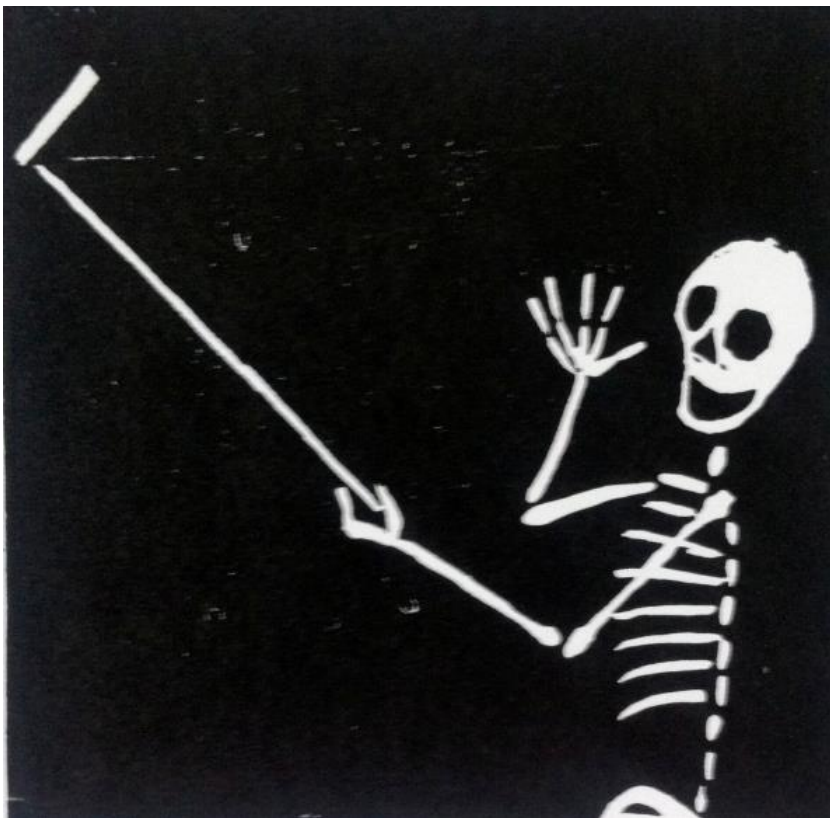
2019: 28-30 June: 'Out Fall', group show, Grosvenor Chapel, part of Mayfair Art Weekend ('Knock Down' and 'Into Thin Air')

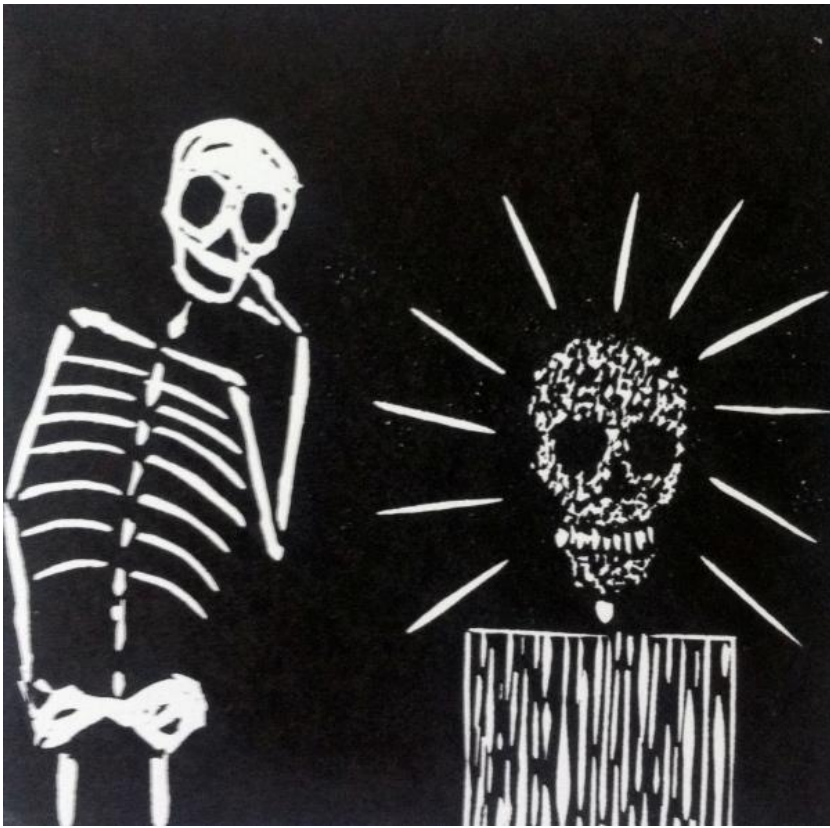
Examples of Work: Mosaics





Examples of Work: Skeleton Prints





Example of Work: Skeleton Mosaic



Example of Work: Photography: Scary Lemon



I see faces in things. I can't help it.