



# Civil Religion

*Ronald S. Beiner*

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## **Civil Religion** Ronald S. Beiner

Civil Religion offers philosophical commentaries on more than twenty thinkers stretching from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. The book examines four important traditions within the history of modern political philosophy and delves into how each of them addresses the problem of religion. Two of these traditions pursue projects of domesticating religion. The civil religion tradition, principally defined by Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau, seeks to domesticate religion by putting it solidly in the service of politics. The liberal tradition pursues an alternative strategy of domestication by seeking to put as much distance as possible between religion and politics. Modern theocracy is a militant reaction against liberalism, and it reverses the relationship of subordination asserted by civil religion: it puts politics directly in the service of religion. Finally, a fourth tradition is defined by Nietzsche and Heidegger. Aspects of their thought are not just modern, but hyper-modern, yet they manifest an often-hysterical reaction against liberalism that is fundamentally shared with the theocratic tradition. Together, these four traditions compose a vital dialogue that carries us to the heart of political philosophy itself.

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