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Barbara A. McGraw. *Rediscovering America's Sacred Ground: Public Religion and Pursuit of the Good in a Pluralistic America*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003. Pp. 241. \$16.95 (Paper).

[1] *Rediscovering America's Sacred Ground* describes the thinking of a young author encountering the "culture wars." The book originates with McGraw's Ph. D. dissertation of 1999. McGraw has turned that dissertation into a work accessible to non-scholars, in a commendable effort to inform and appeal to popular readers looking for new ideas in the area of religion in public life.

[2] In her prologue, McGraw describes how she began as an advocate of church-state separation, along secularist lines, as she believed the founding fathers had advocated. But she was surprised to discover Christian writing that was against church-state separation, yet quoted those same founders. This led her to study the ideas of the founders. McGraw describes how the founders' ideas about religion, now somewhat forgotten, offer a third way between traditional liberal-secularist and conservative-religious views of religion's public role.

[3] In Chapter 1, McGraw introduces the debate that defines the "culture wars." She describes that debate as a battle between secularist and religious people over what leads to a "good" society. The legal battlefield of significant parts of that debate has been the establishment clause of the First Amendment, and the doctrine that it should establish a wall of separation around public affairs, essentially eliminating religion from public life, in order to permit pluralism. This forces a regrettable choice of either pluralism or religion but not both. McGraw argues that there is a way out of this dilemma, which she calls "America's Sacred Ground." America's Sacred Ground is a simple theology and basic structure for participation in public life that intrinsically supports a maximum of pluralism, and was the original intent of the founders.

[4] Part one of the book describes the origin and nature of America's Sacred Ground. McGraw uses the writing of John Locke as her foundation for discussion. She emphasizes Locke's twin devotion to Christianity and pluralism. In Locke's theology, pluralism does not require compromise with Christianity; but rather, it is necessary for genuine Christianity to exist. Without discussion between multiple denominations, Christianity degenerates into an

oppressive, unchristian system. Thus Christianity requires that public policy establish boundaries between the individual's conscience and the actions of the state.

[5] McGraw then goes on to describe how the United States Constitution perfected Locke's vision, extending tolerance even to peaceful atheists, and establishing a two-tiered public forum. The first tier of the public forum, which McGraw calls the Civic Public Forum, is the area of state affairs, directed to the common good. In this forum, Locke's argumentation presses Christians into alliance with all other reasonable thinkers on matters associated with the public good - they both desire pluralism. A freethinker desires pluralism to prevent the interference of religion. A Christian desires pluralism to permit true Christianity to flourish, without the corruption of state power. Thus, religious ways of thinking, so long as they are influenced by Lockean individualism, need not be kept out of public affairs, since they do not threaten other religions, or the non-religious.

[6] The other tier of the public forum is the Conscientious Public Forum. This is the arena into which the government must not venture: the area of private conscience. But this arena is vital and important, for this is where people do what they think necessary to please God and pursue the good. Accordingly, religious discussion is vital to this area. Rather than a sideshow to the Civic Public Forum, the Conscientious Public Forum is the main event, protected and supported by public structures. People may argue passionately for moral laws in the Conscientious Public Forum, while agreeing that those laws are not proper subjects for the Civic Public Forum, because they are matters of faith.

[7] Part two applies this set of concepts to critique leftist, rightist, and centrist thinking. McGraw confronts authors with leftist ideas, such as Thomas Flynn and John Rawls. She then goes on to criticize spokespersons of the right, such as M. Stanton Evans. In each case she argues that these authors fail to appreciate the sacred character and pluralistic imperative associated with America's Sacred Ground. McGraw does not discuss specific hot-button issues, but instead concentrates on the underlying premises of the authors who address such issues.

[8] McGraw's thesis is familiar to libertarians and classical liberals. She provides an important reminder that the distinction between government power and private initiative is not just a matter of free market economics, but also of individual moral decision. In support of that reminder, McGraw makes two useful points. First, she dissects the semantic shift in critical words, notably the word "religion", since the eighteenth century. She observes that the "religion," to the founders, had fewer institutional connotations, and was closer than it is now to words like "conscience." Accordingly, the establishment clause is not designed to protect public life from organized religion but to protect individual consciences from each other.

[9] McGraw's other contribution is to reemphasize the theological roots of pluralism. Too many have drifted into the belief that pluralism is a non-religious virtue, and carelessly assume that all religious believers are, deep down, opposed to pluralism. McGraw's analysis of Locke reminds us that pluralism is a Christian concept. Contemporary Christians, who see themselves as "Post-Constantinian," that is, proud to be neither established nor protected by the state, have a solid rational tradition going back to Locke.

[10] If there is a weakness in McGraw's book, it is that it remains unclear where one draws the line between the Civic Public Forum and the Conscientious Public Forum. What one person sees as a matter of individual faith another believes to be clearly related to the public good. It is the difficulty of finding this boundary, and the occasional need to cross it (as in the nineteenth century, when slaves crossed the line from being property to being persons), that blurs the distinction between the two forums, and erodes the pluralism that they defend. Perhaps a forthcoming book by McGraw will explore this question through a study of current issues.

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