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**Political Affections: Civic Participation and Moral Theology. By  
Joshua Hordern. Reviewed by Travis Pickell.**

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**Political Affections: Civic Participation and Moral Theology.** By JOSHUA HORDERN. Pp. 336. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2013. \$125.00 (HB). ISBN: 978-0-19-964681-4.

“Fire tends upwards, stone downwards. By their weight they are moved and seek their proper place . . . My love is my weight: wherever I go my love is what brings me there” (Augustine, *Confessions* 13.9). Augustine long ago recognized that affections are an inescapable dimension of human existence. Why, then, have emotions and affections been so largely neglected, even opposed, in political philosophy? In *Political Affections*, Joshua Horder, University Lecturer in Christian Ethics at the University of Oxford and Fellow of Harris Manchester College, explores “the nature of affections, their role in morality, and their significance for political relations” (1). Horder weaves together insights from political theory, biblical studies, Christian theology, neuroscience, and cognitive psychology in this wide-ranging investigation of affections’ role in human moral and political life.

Horder begins in chapter 1 by confronting the notion, widespread in modern political theory, that any appeals to emotions and/or affections (and in a derivative sense, “religion”

as well) in the public sphere are basically “anti-democratic, anti-rational, and manipulative” (6). This suspicion, according to Hordern, stems from a “conceptual inadequacy” in political theory regarding the relationship between reason, emotion, and affections. Tracing the cognitivist turn in both moral philosophy and neuroscience, Hordern argues that “emotion itself has a cognitive aptitude” (27). Emotions reflect judgments about what is valuable, and these judgments are open to public, reflective evaluation — in which case it is implausible to argue for the exclusion of the affective dimension of social life from the political process.

In chapter 2 Hordern offers a positive, theological account of “the nature of human affections, their role in morality, and their significance for political relations” (61). According to this account, which draws heavily upon Jean-Yves Lacoste, affections are the “participative beginnings of understanding” (62). They are not sufficient in and of themselves to guide action — indeed, they are characterized by a “worldly, half-lit penury” (81) — but they serve as the entry points, so to speak, into moral reflection upon shared orders of valuation (*ordo amoris*). Through a dynamic process of “intersubjective verification,” affections inhere in common memory (via shared institutions), providing the background conditions for moral reflection and deliberation. Hordern argues that such “memory-stabilized, enduring affections” (112) — and not Aristotelian virtues of character — provide the epistemological stability necessary to sustain political relations.

The final three chapters continue this line of argumentation by demonstrating “how affections shape the political relations which subsist in human societies” (131). Chapter 3 focuses on the political institutions of *representation* and *law*. Hordern begins by describing Martha Nussbaum’s “political eschatology” of “internal transcendence” (132). According to Nussbaum, human existence in a world of constant “upheavals” is characterized by contingency, vulnerability and “interdependent fragility” (133). In such a world, compassion is the paradigmatic political emotion, for it is the emotion which does not attempt to deny human finitude. In contrast, Hordern suggests that an explicitly Christian eschatology, which sees the goodness of the world and the moral order as vindicated by God in the resurrection of Christ, places *joy* directly at the center of the affective life of the people. Through a close reading of Deuteronomy and Luke-Acts, Hordern explains how the communal renewal of participative joy leads to a reinvigoration of moral reflection and deliberation, and provides the preconditions for legitimate political representation (164–174) and ‘wise legal practice’ (179).

In chapter 4 Hordern argues that the “democratic deficit” in Western nation-states (especially in the European Union) cannot be solved by promoting a cosmopolitan ideal of ‘post-national consciousness’ through a Habermasian “constitutional patriotism” (210). Rather, affections engendered through *local attachments* are providential gifts of God that sustain social life and foster trust among citizens. Cosmopolitanism inadvertently “undermines the stability which locality brings” (235), and risks imposing alien laws upon the people. Instead Hordern advocates “critical loyalties in diverse localities” (250) as a means of sustaining affective understandings.

Specifically, in chapter 5 Hordern suggests that the “Holy Spirit’s work in and through the body of Christ as it is expressed in diverse local churches . . . [may] bring renewal in societies’ political affections” (251). Because local churches (through liturgy and tradition) have a basis for “intersubjective affectivity,” they illuminate what it would look like for political communities to seek consensus in light of shared affections. Further, drawing on Bernd Wannenwetsch’s notion of “transposition,” Hordern argues that the grace the Christian receives makes her life into a ‘surplus which can be given to serve her neighbour’ (262), directly opposing the inner logic of scarcity that turns neighbors into competitors for limited goods. This grace is sustained through “word and sacrament,” not as “quasi-Aristotelian practices” (10), but rather through the dynamic back-and-forth of existing as *simul iustus et peccator*. The movement from grace to faith to praise engenders social trust among the churches, which can be parlayed into a joyful commitment to the common good that points the way beyond the “democratic deficit” of the late-modern West.

In the process of his inquiry, Hordern engages at length with prominent contemporary thinkers, such as Martha Nussbaum, Jürgen Habermas, Michael Walzer, and Stanley Hauerwas. This book will be helpful for those looking for a distinctively *Christian* contribution to political philosophy, as Hordern dwells at length on texts from the New Testament and Hebrew scriptures and draws from a wide variety of Christian thinkers — both ancient and contemporary. (Augustine and Luther feature prominently — as do Oxford theologians O’Donovan, Biggar, and Wannenwetsch. The influence of O’Donovan, in particular, is apparent throughout.)

Given the conceptual heavy-lifting that Hordern accomplishes in this book, *Political Affections* may present challenges for the typical college undergraduate student, especially for the student who lacks a background in political theory or Christian theology. While not suitable as an introductory text, many teachers would find it useful for upper-level courses in a wide variety of topics. For example, the first two chapters would be a helpful introduction to “cognitivism” in a class on moral philosophy. Chapter 4 would be a nice resource for a class on globalization and the common good. Seminary professors might consider using chapter 5 in order to help students think about the political vocation of the church in a pluralistic society. *Political Affections* represents a significant contribution to our understanding of the relationship between moral psychology and political theology.

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