



Civilizing Authority: Society, State, and Church

Patrick Brennan

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Voices of Enlightenment have long counseled modern men and women to flee authority, including authority claimed by the church. Aspiring to substitute rock-ribbed law for human, or even divine, authority, today's legal minds pursue a "rule of law, not of men." Any possibility of authority is almost everywhere assimilated to the threat of authoritarian abuse.

Civilizing Authority counters the flight from authority with the claim that it is precisely authority itself that offers a barrier against authoritarianism. The book's authors share the insight that humans cannot increase, or even long survive, without authority, and they observe, from along a broad spectrum of perspectives, that all phases of our human living depend on authority. Families, churches, clubs, monasteries, unions, cities, and states ? human living would be unrecognizable without them, and they all depend upon authority and authorities.

Still, what is "the authority experience?" What are we obeying when when we give willing assent to authority?

The ten authors of *Civilizing Authority*, Christians of diverse belief and professional discipline, unite here to explore the ways in which authority, though elusive, remains possible ? indeed, exigent ? in a post-Christian world. Refusing to conflate genuine authority with positions of power or prestige, they probe the deep, and perhaps transcendental, sources of authority. Friendship, solidarity, liberty, and perhaps even belief ? these, the authors suggest, may be the true springs of the authority that is the principle of increase in human living.

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