Introduction to the Symposium

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In December of 2017, a distinguished group of scholars gathered in San Diego to discuss the final four chapters of my book, *Pagans and Christians in the City*.1 The invitation asked each symposiast for a written submission that might either discuss and criticize the book’s arguments and interpretations or else elaborate on some theme growing out of the book. Unsurprisingly, the participants responded to this invitation in varying ways. In different proportions, some engaged with the book, or with what they took the book to be saying or doing;2 others used the book as a point of departure for discussing one or another of the issues addressed in the book. The submissions supported a lively set of discussions over a period of two days. For me, as the book’s author, it was a (sometimes painful) honor to be the subject of attention from such an impressive collection of critics.

This issue of the *San Diego Law Review* collects the submissions of the symposiasts who chose to have their articles published. A question arose whether I ought to attempt a response. After reflection, it seemed to me that the insights and arguments and criticisms were so numerous and diverse that it would be difficult to offer a cogent and focused response in a short space. In some instances, a proper response would also call for more

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1. See generally Steven D. Smith, *Pagans and Christians in the City: Culture Wars from the Tiber to the Potomac* (2018). In addition to the contributors to this issue, the group included Larry Alexander, David Brink, Bill Galston, Jeff Pojanowski, Connie Rosati, Maimon Schwarzschild, and William Voegeli. At various points, the discussions were joined by my colleagues Mike Devitt, Dov Fox, Bert Lazerow, and Mila Sohoni.

2. I am surely not the first author to read a scathing critical review and think, “These are powerful objections . . . to a book I don’t recall having read, much less written.”
scholarly or philosophical sophistication than I can pretend to possess. So, in the end, it seemed prudent just to let the papers, and the book, speak for themselves.

I do however want to note two respects in which this colloquy may be important quite independent of anything it has to say about Pagans and Christians in the City. In his contribution, Tony Kronman argues for the truth of paganism, as reflected in the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza.\(^3\)

Kronman’s essay is a succinct distillation of his book *Confessions of a Born-Again Pagan.*\(^4\) In an age of blogs, tweets, and sound bytes, it may be that few readers will be inclined to take on that formidable tome. But this is unfortunate, I believe, because in its scope, seriousness, and erudition—and also in its often poetic eloquence—Kronman’s book is a remarkable achievement. I honestly cannot think of anything like it written by a modern legal academic—or, for that matter, by anyone else in our time. If Kronman’s short contribution to this issue leads some readers to engage with *Confessions of a Born-Again Pagan,* I think that will be enough of a reward for this effort. (Even if Kronman’s book, by contrast to an earlier *Confessions* to which it appears to be a self-conscious sequel and rebuttal, does come down on the wrong side of the pagan-Christian divide.\(^5\))

The contribution from Richard Schragger and Micah Schwartzman\(^6\) describes the antisemitic tendencies of T.S. Eliot, whose lectures on *The Idea of a Christian Society* provide both a starting point and a unifying thread for my own book,\(^7\) and their article goes on to explain why Jews have often favored a secular public sphere from which Christian influences have been separated out.\(^8\) Michael Helfand, in response, shows that the

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5. In *Pagans and Christians in the City,* I do not argue for the truth or falsity of either Christianity or paganism, but instead focus more on the historical and political influences of each. But of course, the historical and political influences of a body of thought and practice cannot be wholly separated from its truthfulness—or at least, as I try to put it in the book, from its believability, which is not quite the same thing. Moreover, readers will discern—and Kronman is correct in surmising—that my own inclination on the question of truth would be to favor Christianity over paganism. *See Kronman, supra* note 3, at 343.
7. I was not aware of—but, alas, not wholly surprised by—this unfortunate feature of Eliot’s thought. Antisemitism has of course been a lamentable theme throughout much of Christian history, and of non-Christian history: in my book, antisemitic sentiments appear mostly in the work of the revered Enlightenment—and caustically anti-Christian—historian Edward Gibbon. *See Smith, supra* note 1, at 135–36.
strain of Jewish thought described by Schragger and Schwartzman is only one strand—and, arguably, a declining strand—of a very diverse Judaism. This exchange may be only tangentially related to the arguments of my book, but it addresses what is surely an important and fascinating issue in its own right.

With this brief introduction, here are the articles, offered with the hope that readers interested in the various topics discussed herein might consult the book itself and judge for themselves whether the commendations, criticisms, and characterizations are warranted.

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