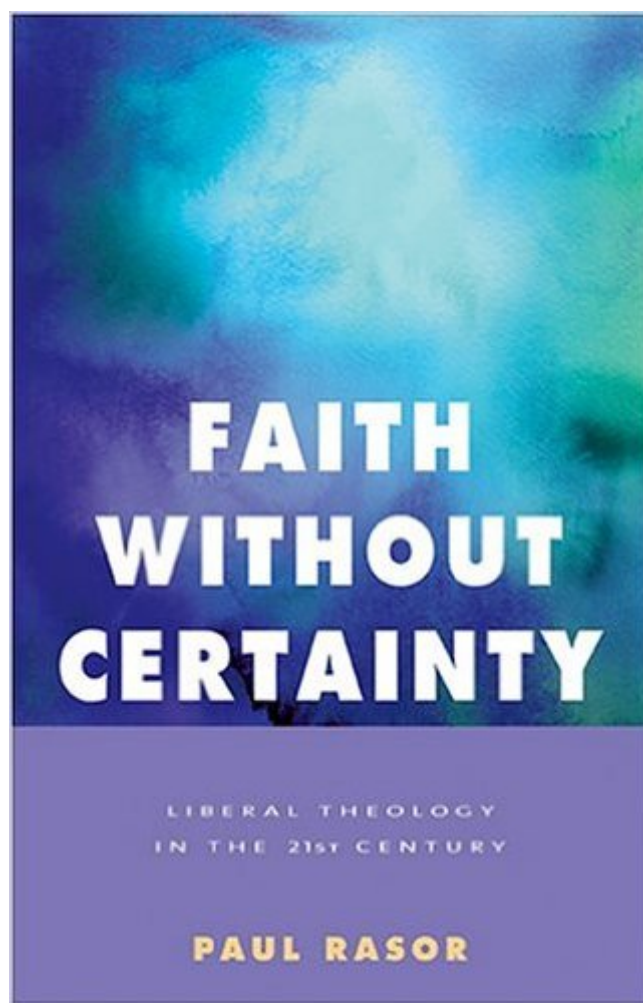


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Faith Without Certainty: Liberal Theology In The 21st Century



Synopsis

"Religious liberals today remain committed to such central principles as free religious inquiry, autonomous judgment about truth claims, and openness to divergent views. Nevertheless, many yearn for more shared content, for a common understanding about their faith that they can share with one another and with newcomers. This dilemma, this tension, can feel creative or paralyzing, freeing or frustrating--but it is undeniably part of religious liberalism."From the Introduction:"This innovative critical analysis of religious liberalism probes the dynamic tensions of a theology that is committed to individual freedom and autonomy on the one hand and a greater sense of community on the other. Much more than a primer, Faith without Certainty lays out the basic characteristics of liberal theology, delving into historical and philosophical sources as well as social and intellectual roots. Clear-eyed but ultimately hopeful, Rasor explores the ambiguous and creative nature of liberal theology today."Ideal for readers who want a better understanding of liberal theology, a religious tradition that is rooted not in authority but in one's own experience and conscience.

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Customer Reviews

Anyone paying attention to current developments in thinking about religion will find this wonderfully well-written book of great interest. Times have changed. What has been called "the linguistic turn" has altered the landscape in the last half of the 20th Century. The chapter titled "Religious Experience and Language" alone is worth the price of the book. It summarizes the major changes since Kant's transcendentalism and Schleiermacher's romantic Christianity emerged in the 19th Century. In the following century, the 20th, philosophy of language thoroughly reconstructed the

foundations of empirical philosophy and theology. The way we used to think about our place in relation to ideas has been turned topsy-turvy. The story of liberal religion since Kant and Schleiermacher has been ambiguous. Prior to the American Civil War and the two World Wars, educational and industrial progress allowed hope for a more perfect civilization in the West. Today, on the contrary, we are faced with a world where civil wars are the norm. Technology races forward but lends itself to endless calamities as well as miraculous improvements, as in food production and health. As our globe shrinks, we require greater understanding across cultures and their religions. So religion finds humanity both full of high hopes and shaken with uncertainties. In this 2005 publication, Rasor tells that story. He also outlines some of the current prospects for religion, liberal and otherwise. With an overview of liberation theology and the challenges of racism to religion in America, he illustrates the need for an open-minded faith. This book appeared just prior to the bursting of the economic bubble, the current meltdown, and the growing threat of global warming.

Given the myriad ways that the term 'liberal' gets thrown around without being defined, I'm grateful for Rasor's concise and readable primer that actually digs into the real roots and trajectories of the liberal theological tradition. If you don't have time to read the entire book, the first two chapters after the introduction will familiarize you with what it is that religious liberals believe and how we came to embrace those values. Whether you're out to support or criticize us, it's important that you know what you're getting into. Love or hate us for what we are, not what we're not. The remainder of the book lays out some of the challenges and frontiers that liberal theology is currently facing in its ongoing development. With the arrival of the postmodern era, liberal religion (as a decidedly modern phenomenon) is reevaluating many of its core commitments (in much the same way that evangelical Christians (another modern movement) are also doing via the 'Emergent Church' movement). Hard and fast categories, such as rugged individualism and universal human experience, are being questioned in the light of community, culture, and language. Rasor is highly critical of his own liberal tradition in relation to issues of race and social class. Despite its value of diversity, liberal religion continues to exist as a predominantly white and middle-class movement. While his criticisms are honest and accurate, I wish that he had spent more time with them. He mentions social Darwinism and the rise of manifest destiny in America, but he says nothing of Eugenics or the Holocaust, both of which were fueled in part by liberal theology.

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