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Review: The Intellectuals Speak Out about God

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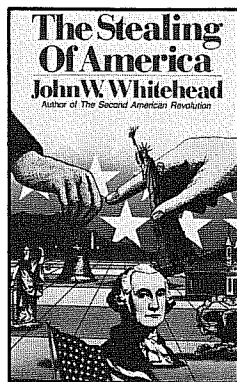
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THE STEALING OF AMERICA
by John W. Whitehead

Reviewed by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., pastor of Reedy River Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina.



John W. Whitehead is a constitutional lawyer specializing in cases involving abridgment of First Amendment rights. He is also founder and president of The Rutherford Institute (named after Samuel Rutherford, 1600-1661), a conservative Christian answer to the radical ACLU. His five books have all dealt with one aspect or another of the theme of Christianity and culture, beginning with his 1977 *The Separation Illusion*.

In this book Whitehead explains why he fears that Americans are faced with a "single, overriding dilemma: what to do about the dangerous direction of the American government." Indeed, for him, this "is one of the most pressing issues of our day" (p.xi). *The Stealing of America* is a lucidly written and well-documented presentation of the New Right's sociopolitical concern. Especially helpful are the abundant references to precedent-setting court decisions. Many of the original source quotations are as alarming as they are startling. For they reflect not the ravings of an inconsequential lunatic fringe, but the fashionable and accepted philosophy of influential "mainstream" authorities.

For instance, Paul Blanshard, writing in *The Humanist*, seeks to salvage some praise for the ailing public educational system by stating, "Our schools may not teach Johnny to read properly, but the fact that Johnny is in school until he is 16 tends to lead toward the elimination of religious superstition" (p.94).

Whitehead carefully documents the presence and dangers of creeping totalitarianism in America. He warns that "we must not think of an overnight change, but rather of a subtle trend by those in leadership—government, media, education—toward greater control and manipulation of the individual" (p.5). He suggests that this alien political philosophy is winning ground basically due to three influential ideas: pragmatism, collectivism, and evolutionism (p.12f). At least five social factors have spurred this downward drift toward totalitarianism: the bureaucratization of government (pp.26,98), the socialization of law (pp.26,80), disinformation by the major media (pp.5,50), disorientation by public education (pp.19,82f), as well as the moral-spiritual vacuum left by pietistic and retreatist Christianity (pp.40,107).

The 10 chapters are well arranged in outlining his argument that America is in a "period of disorientation" (ch.1) which allows for the current totalitarian drift (ch.2). This disorientation is due to the "breakdown of the Christian base" of American culture (ch.4) which has laid the groundwork for a Secular Humanist culture with its "love of death," for example, abortion, infanticide, and so forth (ch.5). The consequences give rise to an attack on three basic Christian social institutions: the family (chs.6-7), the school (ch.8), and the church (ch.9). With such a complex of issues before us, Whitehead warns that we must be careful to establish priorities and a workable plan of resistance (ch.10).

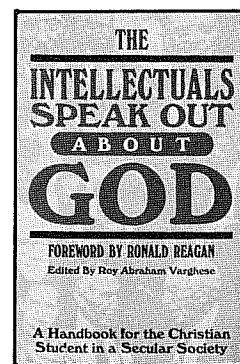
The Rutherford Institute agenda is presented and seems very relevant in

terms of priorities: sanctity of human life (pp.112f), promotion of the traditional family (pp.115f), defense of Christian churches and schools (pp.119f), freedom in the public arena (pp.122f), and aid for those oppressed for their Christian faith in other lands (pp.123f).

In the past decade, the attention of American Christianity has been largely directed toward eschatological and counseling concerns. Now it seems that book publishers are recognizing a "new" field of concern: Christian cultural and political influence. This is an important and healthy sign, but as Whitehead warns: "The staying power of the new [Christian] activism, remains to be seen" (p.107). (Crossway Books, 1983, 158pp., \$6.95)

THE INTELLECTUALS SPEAK OUT ABOUT GOD
edited by Roy Abraham Varghese

Reviewed by Gary R. Habermas, professor of apologetics and philosophy, Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia.



This book, subtitled "A Handbook for the Christian Student in a Secular Society," presents essays by 25 contemporary scholars, chiefly in the fields of science and philosophy. Virtually all of these scholars are dedicated to the general theme that atheism and related views are outmoded and incorrect. The chapters are largely interviews arranged

in three major parts—the Sciences, Philosophy, and Apologetics/Theology. These sections follow introductory comments by Dom Bede Griffiths, President Ronald Reagan, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, and J. Stanley Oakes, Jr.

The variety of writers include some who would term themselves orthodox Christians, others who are much more moderate, and some who would not call themselves Christians in any sense. In spite of this mixture, most of the scholars strongly assert that naturalism, positivism, and atheism in general are disproved as well as being increasingly unpopular options among intellectuals.

Many of the persons in this volume have national or international reputations, which quite naturally increases the interest in such a project. Scientists include Robert Jastrow, Chandra Wickramasinghe, Henry Margenau, and Sir John Eccles. Philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga and William Alston, theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg, and New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce are examples of the high level of scholarship.

The book gives the general impression that the various scholars are both announcing a return among numerous intellectuals to some sort of theistic worldview and that they are providing further impetus to this movement themselves. As Alvin Plantinga states in answer to a question on this subject, "I think there is a definite shift towards theism" (p.165).

There appear to be at least two reasons for such a change in attitude. Several scholars point out evidence that strongly indicates a theistic worldview, such as an increasing realization of the truthfulness of theistic argumentation of various sorts and historical evidence for Jesus' Resurrection from the dead.

Second, there appears to be a strong conviction on the part of numerous scholars that the various forms of naturalism and positivism are both disproven and sterile. In fact, sometimes the dismissal of these atheistic options is rather brisk in nature (pp. 31-32; 35; 44-45).

Although this book is a significant one, a few items detract from its total effort. The four introductory essays, occupying 19 pages of text, at times seem inappropriate. Also, there is some unevenness among the chapters themselves as they are a collection of interviews with the respective scholars, six essays, and three reprints of previously published articles.

Nevertheless, the book succeeds in its stated goal of providing a handbook for the Christian student. This volume is highly recommended for the reader who desires to study modern intellectual trends with regard to the general subjects of theism (including God's existence), the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, origins research, and the trustworthiness of the New Testament. Most of the volume is presented in a very readable manner which usually moves along quickly in a question-and-answer format. Roy Varghese is to be commended for his effort in conducting interviews and editing the material for publication. The work succeeds in its effort to provide Christians with a handbook of world renowned scholars who espouse theism, several of which changed from nontheistic positions due to the weight of the evidence.

This subject should also cause the Christian to do some serious thinking about apologetics. If a worldview shift may be occurring today, Christian apologists should be in the forefront of the discussions and not let such a trend move in just any direction. (Regnery Gateway, 1984, 366pp., \$7.95)

C H I L D R E N

DARK HORSE
by John Fischer

When the reader opens the cover of this book he is plunged into a world of horses, but particularly that of a dark horse that longs to be white. As the adventure story unfolds, so does the analogy between the "dark horse" and the "real Christian," one who grows, stretches, and is refined because of the grace of God. An excellent and exciting allegory for the young reader. (Multnomah Press, 1983, 59pp., \$3.95 paperback) —J.B.

**GOD CARES WHEN I'M SORRY
GOD CARES WHEN I'M WORRIED
GOD CARES WHEN I'M DISAPPOINTED**
by Elspeth Campbell Murphy

In this set of three books author and illustrator Jane Nelson beautifully captures the attention of small children, helping them to apply God's principles in their daily lives. Young children talk

to God about their feelings of sorrow, disappointment, and worry. Each book ends with an applicable Bible verse and tips for the parent or teacher on how to use the book most effectively. (David C. Cook, 1983, 23pp., \$2.50 each) —J.B.

WALKING WITH JESUS
by V. Gilbert Beers
and Ronald A. Beers

Beautifully illustrated, this book is designed to help children become more like Jesus in their actions and attitudes. Each story focuses on one particular quality in the life of Christ and is followed by a valuable "Think, Learn, and Do" section to help the child identify the character quality and give ideas for putting that quality to work in his own life. Excellent motivation for discussion. (Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1984, 166pp., \$14.95) —J.B.

BIBLE STORIES TO LIVE BY
by V. Gilbert Beers
and Ronald A. Beers

This is an excellent book for teaching young children the importance of Christian values. Each of the 91 Bible stories focuses on a particular character quality. At the end of each beautifully illustrated story are questions, thoughts for discussion, and ideas for ways to reinforce the Bible lesson presented. A valuable resource for children's church, the classroom, or family devotions. (Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1983, 191pp., \$12.95) —J.B.

WHAT DID GOD MAKE?
by Marilyn Martyn McAuley

Colorful and compact, this chubby little "peek and find" book is designed to arouse your toddler's curiosity while teaching facts about God's creation. "Who" and "What" questions are asked and descriptions such as "God gave them wings to fly" are given on one page, with answers hidden beneath a flap on the facing page. Your youngster will be excited about guessing each answer, then peeking to find it in picture and word form. Great teaching tool for toddlers and preschoolers. (David C. Cook Publishers, 1984, 26pp., \$3.95) —C.G.