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Review: The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives

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from the lower command in this setting of contextually conflicting absolute norms. One, therefore, may be justified in lying in order to keep the higher command of mercy, i.e., life saving. The conclusion of this view seems to be that there is only one non-contextual absolute-absolute, and that is when graded absolutes come in conflict always keep the higher and be exempted from the lower. There is no need to raise any other issues in this review except to inform the reader of the necessity of reading the literature in order to critically evaluate the thesis of graded absolutism.

Dr. Geisler has furnished for us an excellent service by providing another useful textbook for teaching Christian ethics. The book is worthy of careful consideration as a textbook in ethics for both graduate and undergraduate schools of Christian education.

JAMES M. GRIER
GRAND RAPIDS BAPTIST SEMINARY

God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government, edited by Gary Scott Smith. Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1989. Pp. 300. \$13.95. Paper.

This text is the product of a Geneva College summer, 1987, "Consultation on the Biblical Role of Civil Government." The purpose of the conference was to clarify areas of agreement and divergence among Reformed Christians. Four major positions within the Reformed community were identified: theonomy, principled pluralism, Christian America, and national confessionalism. Leading representatives of each of these positions were invited to present papers at the conference and to respond to each other's arguments and critiques.

Theonomists, or "Christian Reconstructionists," agree that society and politics should be based on Old Testament law. They believe all Old Testament laws are applicable today unless specifically superseded in the New Testament. Their ultimate aim is the creation of a theocracy, and they believe this will come about as America is gradually founded on biblical norms in the postmillennial future.

Principled pluralists advance the concepts of "structural pluralism," meaning God has created certain sovereign institutions and no other institution can properly usurp the power of functions of the other—and "confessional pluralism," meaning that different communities of belief exist in the world because of sin, not because God wishes it. Principled pluralists believe the task of government is to promote righteousness and justice, and that the New Testament affirms that governments must tolerate and protect conflicting faith communities within boundaries of religious freedom. Many principled pluralists also believe Christians must treat the poor preferentially.

Christian America proponents contend that the United States began as a Christian nation, then lost its zeal, commitment, and Christian consensus. They argue that contemporary legislators should restore Christian morality

and the gospel to positions of societal influence. They believe that Scriptural norms should form the basis of a reinvigorated Christian America.

National confessionalism has existed since the mid-1800s. Those who adhere to the tenants of national confessionalism propose an amendment to the United States Constitution recognizing Christ's kingship. They also wish to acknowledge in the Preamble of the Constitution the authority of Jesus Christ.

All four Reformed communities agree that the Word of God is authoritative, Scripture speaks to all of life and Christ is the Lord of creation, God has ordained certain institutions like the family and government, Christians should resist secularization, persuasion not violence is the appropriate method for social and religious influence, and the United States is a *de facto* religiously pluralistic society. Reformed communities disagree on how Christ exercises His kingship over the nations, and they debate contemporary applications of Mosaic law. Reformed Christians disagree on biblical views of civil justice and the legitimate task and power of the state and the nature of confessional pluralism in a free society. They also disagree on whether Christ should be acknowledged in the nation's political documents and on whether the United States began as a Christian nation.

Gary Scott Smith of Grove City College provided excellent introductions to the book and to each section. He noted that the conference sponsors' goal was to help Christians work toward more understanding and agreement on political matters and to encourage Christians to develop biblically based views. The editor provided a helpful question and answer section at the end of the book, further developing understanding of positions by setting the debaters' statements in a conversational context.

This book is long overdue, for it helps readers distinguish subtle differences in Reformed Christian perspectives on religion and politics. It is recommended for every library and study.

REX M. ROGERS
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Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives, by Dallas Willard. Harper and Row, 1988. Pp. 276. \$15.95. Cloth.

Initially I entered this book inquisitively, suspiciously and somewhat prejudiciously (I soon discovered). As an all too typical evangelical Protestant, or simply one steeped in the modern Western philosophical tradition and its skewed anthropology, I saw the "disciplines" of the spiritual life as masochistic machinations of merit exercised by neo-Hindu Christians who had not yet learned the way of free grace in Jesus Christ. Asceticism is a way of self-salvation, isn't it? No. My previous perceptions have been thrown over and, through Dr. Dallas Willard's (professor of philosophy at USC) stimulating, enlightening, cogent and very biblical argument, I have begun to see that the disciplines as *biblically* exercised are neither means of merit nor masochism, but in fact the true way to the fullness of God's grace.

Willard, step by readable step, shows how the way of Christ is the way of the "easy yoke," the way of Christlikeness is the way Christ literally, realistically, daily "learned obedience"—in solitude, in fasting, in prayer, etc. Since the servant is not above his master and since both Christ and all of the disciples and the entire early church *assume* such to be part of the normal Christian life for growth in grace . . . why have we largely neglected these means?

Willard sheds the critical light of Scripture upon our present (popular) reckonings of the nature of our lostness, what it means to be "saved," our understanding of the nature of man as such. Further he shows our *usual* views to be not only unbiblical but too much in keeping within prevailing Western philosophical formulations. Over and over I found this book answering my continually arising points of criticism (but what about . . . ?) with clear answers. What seemed early to be problems were soon cleared up with further explanation of position. More importantly Willard sets forth the biblical view and arguments from Scripture that we all remember reading but do not take seriously. Of special significance is chapter seven, "St. Paul's Psychology of Redemption."

Beyond an effective rationale Willard wisely takes time to survey the history and development and, all too often, the degeneration of the disciplines into merit and self-glory. Further, he gives ample space to describe the point, nature and place of the classical disciplines in the Christian life. Again, and importantly, Willard clarifies how the disciplines relate to grace, to salvation, to the work of the Spirit in Christian lives, the role of the body in salvation, salvation as a *life* more than some existential moment of decision. As Willard states a central relationship;

. . . the physical human frame as created was designed for interaction with the spiritual realm and that this interaction can be resumed at the initiative of God. Then, through the disciplines for the spiritual life, that interaction can be developed by joint efforts of both God and the person (already) alive in the dynamism of the Spirit.

but further, this "exercise unto godliness" is again not the meriting of salvation but its outworking arising from our now regenerate responsibility where-by we *strive* by *God's grace* to lay hold of all we were meant to be.

This book has opened my eyes and changed my mind. Thank you Dr. Willard.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

- ABRAHAM, WILLIAM J. *The Logic of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989. Pp. 245. \$12.95. Paper.
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