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## Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy and The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism (Book Reviews)

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need, Stearns offers three simple principles for Christians to embrace: “Every one of these hurting people is created in God’s image and loved by him. Every one of these challenges has a solution. Every one of us can make a difference” (162). The technology and resources exist to drastically change the circumstances of the world’s most vulnerable, but a concentrated and significant movement of will is needed. The remainder of the book shifts focus toward the response of the church and individuals in repairing the hole in the world and in our gospel.

The most powerful and convicting parts of in *The Hole in our Gospel* are Parts 4 and 5: “The Hole in the Church” and “Repairing the Hole.” Stearns makes a convincing and passionate argument that Christians can and should be the ones who lead the charge to change the world. The American church is *the wealthiest group of Christians in history* (216). He calculates that if all churchgoers committed to tithing their full ten percent, there would be an extra \$168 billion per year: “If every American churchgoer tithed, we could literally change the world. In fact...\$65 billion—less than 40 percent of the extra \$168 billion—could eliminate the most extreme poverty on the planet for more than a billion people” (218). Instead of being known by what we are against, the church needs to be known by our successful efforts to change the world (228). Instead of being comfortable with the American Dream (individual hard work bringing individual success), we should find comfort in belonging to God and being entrusted with, not entitled to, His resources (207).

Stearns laments the failure of the church’s full participation in major social change efforts:

If the Church is indeed a revolutionary kind of institution, called to foment a social revolution by promoting justice, lifting up the sanctity of human life, fighting for the underdog, and challenging the prevailing value systems in our world, then it seems we should be out in front on social justice issues rather than bringing up the rear” (190).

Israel, Jonathan I. *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. 276 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0-69114200-5.

Witte, John, Jr. *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 388 pages including bibliography. ISBN-13: 978-0-521-81842-1. Reviewed by Keith C. Sewell, Professor of History at Dordt College.

When and how did liberty arise? How did we arrive at multi-party, wide-franchise, secret-ballot elections for determining who shall hold office as a legislator? How did we arrive at contemporary democracy with all its faults and blessings? These closely related questions, and others like them, have been posed repeatedly by politicians, lawyers, and historians alike. In the West, as public life over the last two hundred years has lost clear contact with the Christian religion (though is not a whit less religious for all that), the

He shows how the church has lagged behind by citing enslavement of blacks and treatment of Native Americans as examples (190-202). Although his argument is valid, the assumption that the institutional church acts in concentrated ways is questionable. On any issue, there seems to be wide and diverse response within the body of Christ. The church certainly should move together to respond to the vast need in the world, but it seems Stearns even agrees that this response really begins with individuals and small groups of committed people. He mentions Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., William Wilberforce, and others as examples of those who have fought against social injustice and inspired others to join the effort. The chapter “A Tale of Two Real Churches” gives us examples of how local churches saw the need around them and responded with action (231-241). World Vision and other development organizations serve as powerful examples of the impact and influence that a few committed Christians can have in inspiring organizations that do a great amount of good.

Stearns presents a compelling case for the urgency of Christians to “repair the hole” in the world. The final section of the book turns the challenge to us, asking what we are going to do with our time, talent, and treasure. Stearns reminds us again that each of us has a responsibility to act and live out the whole Gospel in a world full of need. He does not argue that everyone should join the mission field but rather that each should give of what he or she has and use influence and resources to make a difference. Interspersed throughout the book are stories of inspiring people and churches that have done amazing things to respond to various problems in their neighborhoods and around the world. One small group of people can change the world. *The Hole in our Gospel* contains an inspiring and convicting message, and Stearns pushes us to imagine a world where a concentrated effort of the church makes a drastic difference in the lives of the world’s most vulnerable people.

tendency has been to answer these questions by ascribing a pivotal role to the American and French revolutions. Certainly, the period 1763 to 1799 is of central significance, as any careful reader of Robert R. Palmer’s now classic *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* (1959-64) will appreciate. The question is this: do we owe the things that we prize—when we speak of liberty, democracy, and free elections—pre-eminently to the French Revolution and the frequently anti-Christian (and especially anti-Catholic) teachings of

the so-called “enlightenment,” which were its guiding principles, or must we look elsewhere for the historical roots of what we have come to associate with “liberty”? Historians still offer divergent, though not necessarily totally contradictory, replies to such questions. This may be said of *The Reformation of Rights*, by John Witte, and Jonathan Israel’s *A Revolution of the Mind*.

English-born Jonathan Israel is one of the most accomplished scholars working on enlightenment studies in North America. He was appointed Professor of Modern History at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, in 2001. He has to his credit a wide-ranging and massively detailed work on the Netherlands: *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness and Fall, 1477-1806* (1995). He is an authority on Baruch Spinoza (1632-77) and is currently at work on a comprehensive three-volume work on the “radical” enlightenment, destined to stand alongside the work of Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945), and Peter Gay (b. 1923). Two immense volumes have appeared so far: *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (2001), and *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (2009).

Israel’s much shorter *A Revolution of the Mind* may be read as a kind of interim report on the entire project as it approaches completion. Israel insists that we distinguish between a “moderate” enlightenment, which sought gradual improvement, and a “radical” enlightenment, which stood more stridently for the sovereignty of reason and, if need be, for the implementation of sweeping programs of change (Israel 3, 15, 19). The distinction is fundamental (94-6), the radicals emerging as deeply anti-hierarchical, without being socialists or communists (97). He sees Spinoza at the head of the “radicals” and Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) heading the “moderates” (239-41). In the crucial period from the 1760s to 1790s, the elites of the *ancien régime* rebuffed the advocates of gradualism (34-36). The greater the delay in the substantive rectification of grievances, the more convincing became the call of the radicals for a “revolution of the mind” (38). Here the Dutch *Patriotten* find their context (39, 66-68, 235). As other writers have emphasized, they were a harbinger in the Netherlands of what was to come in France. Edmund Burke (1729-97) turned against them in 1787, *prior* to the revolution in France (142). According to Israel, the *cabiers* of 1789 testify to the reality of such a “revolution of the mind” in the thinking of many (198, 229). For him, Voltaire (1694-1778) with his critique of radical writers, including Spinoza (208-14, 217), Thomas Reid (1710-96) with his focus on the senses (179), and even Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) with his emphasis on “sentiment” (157), fail to make the cut as “radicals” and are therefore numbered among the assorted “moderates” (218-220).

There is much that is provocative in all this. In my judgment, Israel is right to point to the question of slavery before 1776 (42-44), as well as to draw attention to the shifting meanings of the word “tyranny” (89, 91). He

acknowledges that recent history-writing on the intellectual origins of the French Revolution does not reflect the fundamental moderate/radical distinction he posits (221-5, 231). Beyond these points, as Israel acknowledges, “The Revolution came and went. It proclaimed liberty, equality, and fraternity but failed to establish a viable democratic republic” (230). This statement leaves the way open for Israel to suggest that after early 1793 “the darker side of the French Revolution” emerged, represented by Maximilien Robespierre (1758-94), who “was inspired by the Rousseauist tendency.” Indeed, the “Jacobins did not hesitate publicly to condemn all the *philosophes* and the whole Enlightenment” (231). Israel would have us ascribe the worst crimes and outrages of the French Revolution to its “moderates” rather than to its “radicals”—an argument that can be expected to stir the scholarly pot. However, although the tables turned yet again with the fall of Robespierre, it was the radical agenda that managed to survive, emerging, Israel asserts, as “the official values of a major part of the world after 1945.” Anglo-America, influenced by Locke and others, tended to remain “implacably hostile” to the “radical” legacy (235).

Israel’s arguments, while not conclusive, are constructively provocative. The complexities of the late enlightenment and tortuous course of the French Revolution call for a carefully nuanced approach. And this is certainly what is required when assessing the presentation and utilization of “the revolution” in the *Stone Lectures on Calvinism*, offered by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) in 1898. It is not always clear to readers how Kuyper can laud the Dutch struggle against Spain (1568-1648) and the British “Glorious Revolution” (1688-90) and the American struggle for independence (1776-83) and yet be so emphatically anti-revolutionary in regards to France. Kuyper bracketed the Dutch, British, and American developments together and contrasted them strongly with the French Revolution, while many others—including many in the 1780s—saw great continuities between the American and French events. Persons adopting the latter standpoint tend to see democracy arising in the 1770s and ‘80s.

Others, like John Witte, will adopt a less convulsive and more gradualist view of historical change. His focus is the long-term pre-French revolutionary and partly pre-enlightenment reformed struggle for religious rights. This author will be known to some *Pro Rege* readers as a student of the late H. Evan Runner and as a prolific author in the fields of jurisprudence and the history of law, not least on the relationship of religion to law in regards to marriage and the family. In 2002 he published *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation*. The work now before us, *The Reformation of Rights*, is essentially a continuation of the earlier work, but with the emphasis on the Calvinistic reformation and particularly on its leading public-legal consequences. Witte is Jonas Robitscher Professor of Law and Director of the Center for the

Study of Law and Religion at Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

Witte's purpose is to explore how the Calvinistic reformation, notwithstanding its original orientation towards religious uniformity, became an early-modern "midwife," ushering in the kind of law-state which supported or opened the way for significant measures of legally recognized religious diversity (Witte 1-5). His intent is to make more explicit the seriously neglected part played by Calvinists, Huguenots, Puritans, and Covenanters in this process (20 ff.). The groundwork is first laid by considering the initial Calvinistic reformation—"the original Genevan experiment" (39 ff.). Of course, in the complexities of historical change, intentions and outcomes are rarely identical. Calvin, like the other early reformers, never advocated what later generations would call "freedom of religion" or "principled pluralism." In the context of the times, Geneva steered a course between Lutheran tendencies toward subordination to the civil authority and the Anabaptist depreciation, avoidance, and even sometimes repudiation thereof (4, 43). Calvin's "two-kingdoms" were not those of either (43-45). Of central significance was Calvin's insistence on the clear distinction between church and the civil authority—"two clear distinct areas of responsibility" (75). This, of course, had the effect of placing such reformed churches in the way of any monarchy (Catholic or Protestant) that presumed to lay down the law to the church in matters intrinsically ecclesiastical.

In the central part of his work, Witte explores how successive generations of reformed advocates and apologists developed arguments doctrinal, legal, and historical in order to gain from princes and jurisdictions the public-legal space necessary to worship and live with a good conscience. He does so with successive discussions of "those figures who stood tallest in times of crisis and challenge" (19). They were Theodore Beza (1519-1605), Johannes Althusius (1563-1638), and John Milton (1608-74) of the Commonwealth of England (81-275). From the English Puritans, Witte transitions to a consideration of the New England Puritan thinking that provided the basis and framework of the reflections of men such as John

Adams (1735-1836) and his associates (277-319). This central portion of the book is rich in detail and lush with insight, especially on Beza and Althusius, providing the Anglophone reader with a depth of discussion not readily available elsewhere. A gem from Beza begs for quotation: "The people are not made for rulers, but rulers for the people" (7, 139). One is tempted to add for the twenty-first century: "People are not made for the market, but markets for the people" (cf. Mark 2: 27).

Witte's expositions are at once adroit and judicious—as in his discussion of Milton's theology (230-34, 271-2). And there is much here that will repay further exploration. For Witte, it was the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre (1572) that prompted Calvinist jurisprudence to focus on "law and religion, authority and liberty, rights and resistance" (85 ff.). In the writings of George Buchanan (1506-82) and François Hotman (1524-90) we encounter an approach to the legal past (136-7) synchronous with the orientation of the (original) "Society of Antiquaries" founded in England around 1572 and regarded by Herbert Butterfield as central in the establishment of the initial version of the protestant and Whig interpretation of history. Witte's topic, therefore, plays into the history of the interpretation of history, itself a central theme in the history of historiography.

While each book stands alone, both are parts of larger projects. There is more than enough in *A Revolution of the Mind* for us to look forward keenly to the third volume of Israel's *magnum opus* on the radical enlightenment. Although it is not his intention, his work may prove invaluable in identifying and elucidating the problems surrounding Kuyper's characterization of both American and French revolutions in his *Stone Lectures*. Witte certainly feels the pull of Kuyper on his study, but the remarks that he offers here focus on Kuyper's view of the American experience rather than on his presentation of the French Revolution (321-9). However, Witte hints at "a later volume or two" where we might expect Kuyper and his successors to receive fuller treatment (19). The forthcoming work of both scholars will be eagerly anticipated. In differing ways they can be expected to enhance our reading of Kuyper's famous lectures.

Corbett, Steve, and Brian Fikkert. *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor and Yourself*. Chicago: Moody, 2009. 230 pages. ISBN:978-0-8024-5705-9. Reviewed by Dr. John Visser, Professor of Business Administration, Dordt College.

In their short and easy-to-read paperback book *When Helping Hurts*, Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert leave no doubt about two of their primary beliefs: that Christians need to be more concerned about the poor, and that they need to change many of their well-intentioned but counter-productive methods of helping the poor. Given the credentials and experience of these two Covenant

College professors, the Christian community and especially those who work directly with disadvantaged groups would be well advised to consider their words. Steve Corbett is a Community Development Specialist for the Chalmers Center for Economic Development and the former Regional (Central and South America) Director for Food for the Hungry International. Dordt graduate