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How Now Shall We Live (Book Review)

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How Now Shall We Live, by Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999). 574 pp. Reviewed by Charles Veenstra, Professor of Communication.

Charles Colson has been working toward this book for several years. Since his conversion in prison, he has written books about personal piety, political responsibilities, and challenges for the church. In this book he, along with Nancy Pearcey, attempts to take a larger view and covers many areas, demonstrating his intellectual movement toward a reformational perspective. Clearly in the tradition of Francis Schaeffer, the authors urge all Christians to begin with worldview and compare the Christian worldview with secular worldviews. Three basic questions drive this book: Where did we come from, and who are we? What has gone wrong with the world? What can we do to fix it? The creation, fall, redemption schema is drawn from several scholars in the Reformed tradition: Abraham Kuyper, Albert Wolters, and others (as demonstrated by a large and helpful bibliography). Through its 45 chapters, the authors wrestle with these issues.

A brief outline of why worldview is critically important constitutes Part I. Since the book is addressed to the evangelical Christian community, this section may be helpful to those who are unfamiliar with broad worldview thinking. Colson and Pearcey make it clear that ideas have consequences.

Part II contains several chapters on creation. Taking the perspective of a parent struggling with his young daughter who turned her back on the Christian faith, the authors attempt to show the power of faith as it meets the challenges of scientists who deny God. Whether the reader agrees with each point made by Colson and Pearcey as they argue for creation against evolution is less important than examining the struggle between competing worldviews and understanding the impact of opposing starting points. Their confrontation with the ideas of the well-known Carl Sagan clearly demonstrates the battle of worldview against worldview. Occasionally, some terms get a little confused. A clear definition of religion early in the book would help, although on page 100 they do clarify that it is a complete worldview. The lack of clear definitions also clouds their discussion about science and philosophy; for example, "The Christian must be ready to separate genuine science from philosophy . . . and then let's answer science with science and philosophy with philosophy" (55). They do emphasize that we need to avoid "the mistaken idea that Christianity is opposed to science" (61). Later they tie science and religion together more closely. No retreat from the marketplace of ideas is allowed. They deal at length with creation and the question of origins because "the most important implication of creation is that it gives us our basic understanding of who we are; our view of origins determines our view of human

nature" (140). The struggle becomes personal as he wrestles with the fact of his grandson's autism, concluding that each child is precious no matter if that child is different from other children.

"The Fall—What Has Gone Wrong with the World?" is the subject of Part III. The struggle between those who believe in the Fall versus those who believe in the innate goodness of humans is driven by this question: which meets the test of reality? Through illustrations and stories, the authors show the ramifications of worldviews which do not accept the Fall. The problem of suffering is treated forthrightly.

How people try to achieve their own redemption is the thrust of Part IV. New Age religion, sex, science, and consumerism are among the secular attempts at redemption. Throughout the section, the authors ask these questions of any worldview: "Can it make sense of the human predicament? Does it offer genuine redemption? Is it true?" (271)

The final, lengthy section provides a catalog of stories describing how certain Christians have faithfully challenged other worldviews. These stories include a prisoner being changed into one who ministers to prisoners, restoration of marriage and family, renewal of education, one policeman's long but successful struggle to improve a neighborhood, and more. Woven through the stories is a perspective that avoids sacred/secular dualisms, elaborates on the cultural commission, reinstates moral authority into the law, understands the order in creation, and reclaims popular culture, including prime time television. The Christian worldview is indeed a view for the world and no part need be yielded to those who oppose God. One cannot help being moved deeply by the story of Kim Phuc. As a young girl, she became famous on June 9, 1972, when the picture of her naked little body, burned by napalm from American planes in Vietnam, was emblazoned in the *Washington Post*. Her story is one of recovery and conversion to Jesus. Finally, in a veterans' gathering in 1996, she met and hugged the pilot who flew that mission. When he said to her, "I am sorry. I am just so sorry," her response was, "It is okay. I forgive. I forgive" (486). Such stories demonstrate the power of a Christian worldview in action. They alone are worth the price of the book. They also show the impact of one person and small groups, the "little platoons" that Colson described in his book *Kingdoms in Conflict*.

One need not agree with every point to profit from this book. Indeed, I would be curious to discover what scientists would say about some of the arguments Colson and Pearcey make. The same can be said for their claims about

what art should be. In my opinion, they ask too much of the instituted church, but these questions and potential disagreements should not detract from the thrust of this major work. Their purpose is to urge Christians to fully engage other worldviews; in fact, they want Christians to discuss these issues in depth so that we can form a more united front as we wrestle with nonchristian worldviews.

Essentially, the authors' approach is not simply one of being reactive, that is, of putting out secular fires. Their approach is this: "We begin with our personal lives and habits, move out from there to our families and schools and then into our communities—and from there into our society as a whole" (371). Rather than having the world set the agenda, they urge that Christians be proactive in showing how now we should live. They contend that the Lord's cultural commission is inseparable from the great commission (295). All the while, we are asked to think and discuss not simply the specifics; rather, "we must fight worldview with worldview" (428).

This book would be a fine choice for a capstone course in Christian colleges. But it should be read by many more. Although it is a large book, it is not hard to read. Even a chapter a day would be a helpful way to work one's way through this material. To be engaged with these issues for 45 days would be a wonderful way to understand the all-encompassing impact of a Christian worldview. This reviewer hopes readers will conclude with the authors that "we are overcome by sheer wonder that God has given us not only salvation but also a basis for living out all of life in the grace of his presence" (491).

Editor's note: We followed up on Veenstra's comment, "I would be curious to discover what scientists would say about some of the arguments Colson and Pearcey make."

Home in Alfalfa, by Hugh Cook (Oakville, ON and Buffalo, NY: Mosaic Press, 1998). 245 pages. \$16.95 Canadian (paper back) and \$21.95 U.S. (hard cover). Reviewed by John Van Rys, Associate Professor of English.

In *Home in Alfalfa*, Hugh Cook explores familiar territory, but he does so in a new direction. As in his first collection of short stories, *Cracked Wheat* (1984), and his novel, *The Homecoming Man* (1989), Cook explores from the inside the lives of the Dutch immigrant community in Canada. The difference here is that Cook focuses his attention exclusively on small town Ontario, telling a set of interrelated, serio-comical tales. Cook's success in *Home in Alfalfa* is that he effectively works in the ironic mode. That is, he pokes fun at what he loves, exposing the weaknesses and foibles of characters that he (and we as readers) laugh at and love at the same time. In *Alfalfa*, Cook captures the comical side of our fallen nature while affirming the workings of grace.

by inviting Dr. Arnold E. Sikkema, assistant professor of physics at Dordt College, to add a brief supplement to Veenstra's review. It follows below.

Colson and Pearcey are to be commended for demonstrating the role of views of science on contemporary worldviews, and the significant functioning of theistic belief in the scientific revolution. They rightly encourage us to "oppose *bad* science with better science" (61), but aspects of their portrayal of the scientific community and task might promote cynicism rather than involvement. Stating that "*the* task for Christians . . . is . . . to expose the flaws in scientific naturalism" (422, italics mine) emphasizes the reactive and defensive mode instead of promoting obedient scientific study as a direct answer to the cultural mandate. And there are several examples in which the science presented as "better" is simply wrong. For example, while Colson and Pearcey claim, in an attempt to demonstrate design, that "There is no known . . . explanation . . . for the precise balance in the electrical charges of the proton and the electron" (64), one was given by theoretical physicists in the 1960's (awarded a Nobel Prize in 1979 after being experimentally verified in 1973). Besides, when we recognize that "in [Christ Jesus] all things hold together" (Col. 1:16,17) and "[He] sustain[s] all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3, NIV), there is no dichotomy between natural explanation and design.

Colson's broad readership will benefit from being made aware of the challenge the intelligent-design movement is posing to dogmatic neo-Darwinianism; however, it would have been helpful to point out that even among Christians there is significant debate about this movement which perhaps over-emphasizes the role of reason in the recognition of God (Romans 1).

As its title suggests, Cook's collection of stories takes us into the heart of fictional Alfalfa in southern Ontario—a small town filled with small-town people, events, and institutions. Here, we meet the crowd at Lucille's Lunch, gossiping and commenting on all subjects under the sun. Here, we find aging Dutch immigrants (some aging gracefully, others not), characters like Hilbert TeBrake, who gives his long-suffering wife Dorothy a garage door opener for her birthday. Here, we also follow the comical love life of 39-year-old Virginia Wiebinga, from a nightmarish nighttime date collecting moths in the woods all the way to the altar. And we meet men and women in the middle of raising families, from Dorothy DeHeer, a frustrated minister's wife and mother of three teenage boys, to