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Two Shall Become One: Reflections on Dating, Courtship & Marriage (Book Review)

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3. It should account for its biblical roots and its place in the Christian tradition.

4. It must deal both with our highly differentiated society and with a rapidly shrinking world (182-4).

This is an agenda worth pursuing. As an economist, it is a strong reminder to me of our need for biblically reforming cross-disciplinary work on social problems.

A major strength of the book is Skillen's forceful and insistent demand for a "consistent, coherent, and integral view of politics" (196, for example). He raises this point repeatedly in his discussions of the various Christian approaches to politics. "To think in a Christian fashion about politics requires an understanding of the place of civic life and government in God's world, on his terms. It will not be enough to apply some other human institution to the 'foreign world' of politics" (67). This provides a way out of the problem of waiting for Christians to deal individually or corporately with injustice in this world. God gives political structure to push society to provide justice for all its members without having to wait for enough Christians to act justly. On this point, Skillen's emphasis on a coherent political theory is necessary, understandable, and has practical implications. But it also leaves open the possibility of over-emphasizing the need for such a political view. The question is one of balance. While I don't believe Skillen has this in mind, I hope that Christians engaged in political and social action don't take him so seriously that Christian political activity decreases until we can develop a consistent theory for that activity.

Related to this concern, there is one aspect of the book that I would have liked to see developed more. Political theories are not necessarily consistent with political actions. Skillen describes the cautious and critical conservatives (one of his groupings), for example, as allowing "various conservative habits or assumptions to supply the norms they use to expose

injustice, but they do not, for the most part, give a creation order account of those norms. Thus they will also find themselves conserving unjust habits and assumptions without knowing" (202-3). This may or may not be true. This point is, however, that we may be surprised (by the Spirit) to have just and biblical political positions despite our "habits or assumptions" *because* we are inconsistent in our positions. Again, until the second coming, we will likely experience this at the same time we are rightfully striving for a consistent, coherent, and integral (and biblical) view of politics.

Skillen also points to a positive role for the Christian practitioner in the process of moving toward more biblical political perspectives and action. His descriptions of the limitations and inconsistencies of various Christian political positions call for more interaction among theorists and practitioners in various fields. Practically speaking, the move to consistency and integrity of Christian political positions will proceed more quickly the more seriously practitioners take their theoretic roles and the more seriously theoreticians take practitioners' input into the process of developing these positions. Practitioners need to act to deal with injustice, as well as engage in informed discussion about the nature of justice. Theorists need to listen to practitioners without prejudice, and they need to be involved in the political process to remind themselves what it means to live in a differentiated society. Without joint participation between theorists and practitioners, no discussion ultimately can be productive or practical.

The Scattered Voice accomplishes Skillen's stated goal of encouraging Christians "... to listen carefully and to argue rigorously with one another to discover the contours of a Christian political perspective" (17). Skillen has served the Christian community well by providing a forum to accomplish that end. It deserves to be read widely.

Two Shall Become One: Reflections on Dating, Courtship & Marriage, by Harry Van Belle (Burlington, Ontario, Canada: Welch Publishing), 1991. 80 pp. Paperback \$11.95. Reviewed by Charles Veenstra, Professor of Communication.

Nearly everyone is interested in sexual differences; most people marry or want to. Consequently the topics of this book will likely interest a very wide audience. From a biblical perspective, Van Belle traces sexual relationship development from the teenage years through marriage, showing how key factors in making husband and wife one are attraction, intimacy, and commitment. His little book is exceptionally well-written and is based on his wide experiences as a mar-

riage counselor, a college professor, a husband, and a father.

The book begins with a short section on human sexuality and how it influences all relations between the sexes. The author then explains how the stages of relationship development before marriage need significant time since it is at this point that teenagers "learn to be married" (13). He shows how sexuality needs time to mature—to move beyond, but not ignore, the erotic

life that orients itself to looks, which is characteristic of teenagers. But, he says, "middle-aged people whose only turn-on is still the physical features of the other sex should worry" (17). Dating is a time in which two people move beyond popularity games to discovering who they like and who likes them. He distinguishes courtship from dating (a somewhat arbitrary distinction) by labeling this as the stage where a boy and a girl focus their attention exclusively on each other. In this stage people learn to self-disclose, become vulnerable, and develop intimacy. An interesting point that he makes is that "vulnerability evokes a caring response" (24). Thus, the very act of becoming vulnerable through self-disclosure is an invitation for the other person to care even more. Yet, as he points out, self-disclosure has significant risks. Movements toward intimacy must be taken with care. "There are no shortcuts on the road to true intimacy, not even erotic ones" (26). In our society, intimacy is often confused with erotic sexual activity. "Just as mutual attraction holds out the promise of intimacy, so intimacy entails the promise of commitment" (27), which is what happens in engagement. All of this is part of the process of two becoming one. But it does not stop with the wedding.

The largest section of the book deals with marriage. While most people may think they know what marriage is about, they may be surprised at Van Belle's careful description of what actually occurs when two people who have finally achieved self-identity give up much of that to form a new identity which is different from either of the two that came together. "Marriage is by its very nature a union of differences" (40). In my opinion, he emphasizes the differences too much, but he also stresses correctly the complementariness which helps make marriages work. Learning to be married, he says, occurs throughout all of life: "learning to relate is a task God gives us to do while we pass the time being married" (41). He describes norms for marriage: holding each other to the initial commitment, taking time for talking and listening, mutual up-building, stroking, confrontation without blaming, etc. Problems will occur and he provides recommendations, not easy "how-to" steps, for how the married couple can work through their difficulties. Intimacy is viewed as the goal of marriage—it "is also a calling or a task, something to do" (54). "Intimacy is not just a state of mind or a feeling of closeness. Intimacy is

rather a quality of the relationship. It is the ability to live with each other and the capacity to do things together" (55). Intimacies in several types: work, play, thought, taste, spiritual, conflict, and emotional. The context of marriage work, family, etc.—often puts constraints, which he discusses succinctly, on intimacy. Nevertheless, the married couple must maintain intimacy in order to fulfill the rest of their life calling and thus, he says, "The greatest gift you can give to your children is a good marriage." He deals honestly and forthrightly with the problems of marriage that threaten intimacy.

While I have no fundamental disagreements with this very worthwhile book, I would appreciate an expanded treatment of communication as the lifeblood that nourishes relationships. I would also like a fuller treatment of marriage in the model of the covenant as God's marriage to his people. Some wrestling with Ephesians 5 would help.

The book is packed with insights. A few examples may illustrate. "Mastering the art of making commitments is the last hurdle a teenager faces on the way toward adulthood. . . . The hard part of making commitments is not what we include but what we exclude when we make a choice" (29). "The gift of marriage, as with so many of God's other gifts, is a calling" (47). "Because the heart of marriage is the celebration of intimacy, the common mistake in marriage is not abuse or desertion, but simple neglect" (48). "Children need adults, . . . but equally so, adults need children" (68). "Anxious parents don't make good parents" (70).

I enjoyed reading this book a second time fully as much as I did the first time. On the one hand, Van Belle avoids the scholastic treatise which might weary persons not familiar with research on these subjects and on the other, he also avoids the cheap approach of easy steps to get marriage on track.

I recommend this book highly for several groups: high school classes on marriage and family, college classes in interpersonal communication as well as marriage and family, pastors for use in premarital counseling, marriage counselors, courting couples, and married folks who are willing to grant that they might be able to learn a little more about marriage. If a couple were to study and discuss one chapter each day for a week, I believe their marriage would benefit, even though Van Belle warns: "The last thing people will try to change in the whole world is themselves" (43).

Mathematics: Is God Silent? by James Nickel (Ross House Books, Box 67, Vallecito, CA 95251) 1990. xi + 126 pages. Reviewed by Arnold H. Veldkamp, Associate Professor of Mathematics.

This book addresses the question of its title as well as related questions, such as: Is mathe-

matics a "neutral" subject? Is there a Christian view of mathematics? If so, how should this affect