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## Mathematics: Is God Silent? (Book Review)

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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

the way mathematics is taught in a Christian school?

The book is divided into two sections. The first six chapters give a brief history of mathematics, especially looking at the various worldviews that influenced its development. In this section of the book Mr. Nickel also addresses the questions listed above. These questions have been around for a long time, and there have been several attempts to answer them, some more successful than others. The author has done an excellent job of collecting, from a wide variety of sources, both Christian and secular, a number of ideas which allow him to state unequivocally that mathematics is not "neutral," that there is a God glorifying way of viewing mathematics, and that the subject itself testifies to the Creator in a way that leaves the secular mathematician and scientist openly mystified.

Mr. Nickel does a thorough job of marshalling the answers that a number of Christians have given, but I particularly appreciated his documenting a number of sources where secular mathematicians are mystified by the fact that though mathematics is a human inven-

tion (their view) discovered over many centuries by many different people, yet it is coherent throughout and finds applications throughout creation.

The second section deals with how the teaching of mathematics in a Christian institution will be affected by our view. This section treats a wide variety of topics in mathematics and will be of particular interest to secondary and postsecondary teachers.

The book is intended for a general audience, for teachers, parents, students, and any Christian interested in a biblical approach to mathematics. As such the mathematics used is very general, understandable by all. It is must reading for all Christian mathematics teachers, and I recommend it to parents with students attending a Christian school. Each chapter has a number of discussion questions, making it useful for group study.

The book documents all its sources with footnotes and includes an extensive bibliography. The book lacks an index, which I think would have been useful, but in all other respects is an excellent book on the topic.

*Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation*, by Mark A. Noll (ed.) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House) 1991. 227 pages. Reviewed by Michael Williams, Assistant Professor of Theology.

This introduction to the confessions of the sixteenth century is meant to serve as a college theology text or as a guide for pastors or laypeople who want to understand their heritage. It's for people who want "to know what the fuss was all about in the sixteenth century" (II). Noll writes introductions for, and presents the texts of ten confessions. From the Lutheran tradition he takes Luther's Ninety-Five Theses and Small Catechism, and the Augsburg Confession. Three Reformed confessional statements are included: Zwingli's Sixty-Seven Articles, the Genevan Confession, and the Heidelberg Catechism. The English Reformation is represented in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, and the radical Reformation is reflected in the Anabaptist Schleithem Confession. Noll also includes two Roman Catholic documents for comparison: the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent and the Profession of the Tridentine Faith. Thus, we see that the texts run the gamut from Lutheran to Roman Catholic, from Reformed, to Anabaptist and Anglican.

The introductions are solid, if sparse. Noll does not seek interpretation here, but merely historical and theological contextualization. The texts are left to speak for themselves. The introduction to the work as a whole includes a short discussion on the definition of a confession, confessional authority, historical nature, and limitations.

Noll admits that there is nothing in his book that is not obtainable in John H. Leith's *Creeds of the Churches*, which is still in print. "The only justification" he can offer for the publication is that it limits its scope to, and therefore highlights, the confessional documents of the Reformation era. Each chapter includes a short bibliography of principal secondary literature relevant to each confession, but Noll himself leans most heavily on Philip Schaff's *Creeds of Christendom*. In fact, the articulations sometimes look as if they have been taken over almost whole-cloth from Schaff.

It is to be admitted that Schaff is, as Noll himself says: "the greatest resource in English for anyone interested in creeds and confessions." Yet Noll's parroting of Schaff gives the book the look of having been thrown together quickly. That perception is reinforced by a major mistake and a subsequent omission in the work. The reader may have noticed from the above list that the Belgic Confession is not included in the collection. Noll comments: "By limiting selection to the first two generations of the Reformation, significant documents like the Belgic Confession, the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, and other important statements had to be omitted" (p.22). Noll works with confessions that were produced between 1517 and 1571, yet Guido de Brey (1523-67) wrote the Belgic Confession in 1561, two years before the production of the Heidelberg