
Pro Rege

Volume 11 | Number 3

Article 7

March 1983

Christian Perspectives on Sociology (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

De Jong, Fred J. (1983) "Christian Perspectives on Sociology (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 11: No. 3, 26 - 27.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol11/iss3/7

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Vander Goot, Mary, *A Life Planning Guide for Women*. Paideia Press, Ontario, Canada, 1982. Reviewed by Gloria Stronks, Associate Professor of Education.

During the past twenty years a great deal has been said and written about the women's liberation movement. When Christian men and women write about this topic, however, it is often from the viewpoint of either the traditionalist or of those who reflect current moods in society. Traditionalists promote the idea that for a woman to be considering options other than that of homemaker, wife, and mother is a dangerous movement away from the biblical norm. The current feminist view is that women are to be all that it is possible for them to be, in spite of the possible destruction of relationships or institutions along the way.

A Life Planning Guide for Women was written for and about women between the ages of twenty and fifty who seem to be stuck in a confusing "liberation gap." Vander Goot describes the dilemma faced by such women. How are they to live responsibly and thoughtfully in deliberately moving ahead to become all that God has made it possible for them to be? At a time when societal pressures have encouraged women to sound liberated, how do they face the challenges of learning to live well?

Assuming that learning to live well requires change, the author provides guidelines for facing the problems one is likely to encounter along the way. She suggests the need for support in the process of change. The woman who has invested most of her energy in parenting and family concerns may assume that the family, in turn, will offer her the encouragement needed in this new venture. However, the very close involvement of the family members usually means that, rather than being a source of encouragement, they will likely need reassurance themselves at this time. The support for the woman will have to come from a friend or mentor, and when a live mentor cannot be found, a surrogate mentor, in the form of a book, will provide needed encouragement.

Christian Perspectives on Sociology, Stephen A. Grunlan and Milton Reimer, eds., Grand Rapids, Mich.; Zondervan Publishing House, 1982. 457 pp. Reviewed by Fred J. De Jong, Instructor in Sociology and Social Work.

Since Auguste Comte's pioneering work in the early 1800's and the subsequent inception of sociology as a scientific discipline, Christians concerned with the study of society have faced an unattractive dilemma. One could adopt mainline sociological thought based on positivism and cultural relativism. Obviously the result frequently would be to disregard Biblical truths for the nature of man, his purpose and how he should live. The alternative approach is to permit non-Christians and their methods to dominate the field while Christians analyze and comment from the sidelines. Nearly as un-

Vander Goot provides an excellent description of the stages through which women move in their various relationships: wife with husband, parent with child, daughter with parents, friendships, and vocation. The stages which she presents differ from those described by other developmental theorists in that Vander Goot recognizes the likelihood of being in different stages at the same time, depending on the circumstance and the relationship. Within each relationship the woman moves from "predisposition" (getting ready for the relationship by leaving herself open to influence and allowing herself to change) to "immersion" (being totally involved in the new situation) to "emergence" (accepting the relationship as it is, with all of its satisfactions and disappointments). The first two stages have been recognized and discussed in other books but the author makes a particularly valuable contribution in her description of emergence. Vander Goot modestly acknowledges her lack of clarity in this chapter by saying, "There are few good models for emergence and little available advice." But she has provided a step forward in helping the reader to understand that rather than outgrowing relationships or discarding them as we change, emergence conserves our attachments and investments in others. The final chapter, "Charting Your Course," provides guidelines for taking charge of one's life.

This book is a valuable aid in clarifying relationships, an essential step before decisions concerning change can be made. It was not the author's intention to address specific problems faced by single women or by married women who are working through careers. *A Life Planning Guide for Women* will be a helpful book for one particular group of women: those who are married, middle-class, between the ages of twenty and fifty, and not actively involved in careers.

satisfactory as the first choice, sociology as a discipline could be allowed development in its own independent and godless direction, while Christian students, scholars, and researchers glean from the wreckage whatever conclusions or principles which are perceived as congruent with Christianity.

Although the second choice of "gleaning" is superior to the first option of positivism, neither course of action represents an effort to integrate Biblical truths into the field of sociology so that these truths become the driving force for research and discovery. In fact, a flaw of both

approaches is that they fail to lay the claim of Christ's lordship over all of life, including sociology. The positivistic approach can be readily recognized as unacceptable because its assumptions and methods are so forthright, but the "gleaning" strategy can be equally dangerous. For under the name of Christian, a whole field of endeavor is literally allowed to go to hell accompanied by sincere, but ineffective, comment from Christian scholars.

Grunlan and Reimer in *Christian Perspectives on Sociology* have fallen victim to the "gleaning" strategy. The reader they have compiled is useful in itself, but is designed as a supplement to secular texts. Consequently the book is brief in some areas, such as on economics, status and roles, and silent on other important sociological issues, such as women, aging, and less-developed cultures. Of course, there is no need to set up a straw-man here. Grunlan and Reimer never intended their reader to be comprehensive, and that is the problem! *Christian Perspectives on Sociology*, if it is to live up to its title, and Christian sociologists, if they are to be obedient to Christ's lordship, must press His claim on the whole discipline of sociology. And here lies the very basis for my disagreement with Grunlan and Reimer. They admit at the outset,

That while the authority of the Bible must be respected, it is not a Christian sociology that is advocated. The discipline of sociology is in itself neutral and descriptive, not normative. (p. 20)

It is at this point that Reformed students and scholars must point to the dangerous dualism implied in any such assumption of neutrality, and present instead the Biblical imperative for obedience in every part of man's endeavor. For Christian sociologists that means biblically-based assumptions, theoretical constructs consistent with Christianity, research motivated by

Christianity and the Age of the Earth, by Davis A. Young. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982. 188 pp. Reviewed by Russell Maatman, Professor of Chemistry.

One might expect this book to be concerned with evolution. But Young means just what he says in the title of the book: he discusses the age of the earth, not evolution. Young maintains that one can accept a great age of the earth without accepting evolution (this is his position) and so, unlike many authors, he focusses on only the one issue: age.

The book consists of three sections. In the first section Young traces the earth-age ideas of the Christian church from early in the New Testament era up to the present. He displays a very broad knowledge of the literature on this subject. Next, he discusses scientific evidence concerning the age of the earth. The last section consists of a treatment of earth-age philosophical questions debated for several decades. The first two sections com-

prise about eighty percent of the book.

The historical section is not polemical. It explains well the background of the various modern answers to the age question. This first section is necessary, but it is the second section which will be quoted. The heart of the book lies in its scientific arguments.

Christian ideals, and texts which comprehensively present sociological knowledge in the light of God's truths—and, of course, Christian readers in sociology.

Grunlan and Reimer do offer some useful insights, provided we keep in mind the previous caveats. A key chapter on Biblical authority and cultural relativity is excellent. The Scriptures are termed "supra-cultural" because the truth of its contents are absolute and not dependent upon cultural contexts. The cumbersome term, but useful concept, "relative relativism," is proposed to help explain how different cultures can have different standards of behavior and not transgress Biblical norms. For example, names in a Canadian Indian tribe are private property and it is considered theft to use a name until its holder dies and bequests it to you. In contrast, personal names in the dominant culture of North America are part of the public domain and can be used at will. In such cases, Grunlan (the author of the article) recommends a four-step process of evaluation based on cultural norms and Biblical authority.

Grunlan and Reimer have presented a well-organized reader with 20 articles representing major sociological topics. It only briefly touches upon major sociological theories, however, and has heavily drawn its contributors from fundamentalist Christian colleges, e.g. seven of the twenty articles are written by staff at St. Paul's Bible College in Minnesota. Discussion questions are listed at the end of each article, including suggested readings, which could be very useful for college classroom application.

Grunlan and Reimer have produced a helpful reader for Christian students and sociologists, but only when selectively considered and critically read. The reader should be recognized as tentative and out-of-sequence, first step in the development of a truly distinctive Christian approach to the study of society and social interaction.

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Young argues in two ways. He claims that scientific evidence indicates an earth age of billions of years; and he also claims that the scientific arguments which have been offered to refute this position are not valid. Thus, on the one hand, he carefully explains the radioactive dating method and how its results point to a very great age. Anyone who wishes to discuss this method must comprehend what Young says about the potassium-argon (pp. 99-103) and the rubidium-strontium whole