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## God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams and Consulting the Faithful: What Christian Intellectuals Can Learn from Popular Religion (Book Reviews)

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reality of a transcendent realm or power) and the possibility of divine intervention in history (miracle). Thus he begins the book with a critique of the Humean objections to miracles. Davis adequately shows that Hume's objections will not stand, and along the way gives a solid definition of a miracle. A miracle is an event "that (1) is brought about by God and (2) is contrary to the prediction of a law of nature that we have compelling reason to believe is true" (10).

Each chapter takes up a different aspect or implication of the resurrection doctrine. For example, the second chapter (Resurrection and History) includes an excellent discussion of Troeltsch's historical-critical principles (30-34). Davis wants to defend the full historicity of the resurrection because he is convinced that Jesus was risen bodily from the grave. Here he looks at the empty tomb tradition and the biblical testimony to the bodiliness of the resurrected Christ. This naturally brings him into conflict with the second option noted above, the idea of a "spiritual" resurrection. Davis expresses not only dismay but also apparent bewilderment that conservative Christians "ignorantly hope for something after death more like the immortality of the soul or even reincarnation than bodily resurrection" (viii).

Davis effectively shows that the concept of a spiritual body is a contradiction in terms. Understood in popular Platonic terms (the most likely source for the doctrine [86, 90]), the noun ("body") is modified by an adjective ("spiritual") which actually negates it (45-46). Thus, to say that Jesus was raised in a spiritual body, or that we will be so raised, is like saying that the grass is not-green green.

Davis's understanding of the apologetic concern is worthy of note. He holds to an apologetic strategy which he calls "soft apologetics." Soft apologetics is not an attempt to show the irrationality of a rejection of Christian claims, but a defense of the plausibility of the Christian faith. Where hard apologetics attempts to argue that the Christian position is the only rational option (something which Davis doubts is possible [174]), soft apologetics is an attempt to

show that Christians are within their intellectual rights to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. Davis's humility concerning apologetic strategy complements an equivalent humility regarding the product of apologetics. The aim of the apologetic enterprise is not evangelism, though for some it might pave the way for faith, but to provide cogent arguments which buttress Christian claims, and thus demonstrate the plausibility of the faith and defend it against detractors.

The second purpose of the book, to demonstrate the importance of the resurrection doctrine, is not carried out as successfully as the first, the rational defense of the doctrine. While Davis does a good job with the biblical materials relevant to the resurrection of Christ, he lacks the theological background to mine the significance of the resurrection. In short, he articulates and defends the resurrection, but is not up to the task of getting at its existential import. Of course the resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee and model of the general resurrection at the end of the age. A good portion of the book concerns a defense of the bodily resurrection of Christ and a consideration of issues relative to the general resurrection (continuity of human identity, the intermediate state, temporary disembodiment, etc). And Davis addresses them all with vigor and philosophical expertise – all the more reason why the one chapter devoted to the meaning of the resurrection is such a let down.

The bodily resurrection of Christ forms the continuity of Davis's work, but he fails to capitalize upon that continuity. Nowhere does he discuss the relationship between redemption and creation, and how the resurrection constitutes the essential link between them. The doctrine of creation makes no appearance in the book at all. Without such a discussion, the issues of the book remain as so many alphabet blocks upon a table, not quite spelling anything. Yes, the resurrection declares God's victory over death (198ff); but it also declares the nature of that victory.

Philosophical apologetics, even one as exegetically informed as Davis's, is no replacement for theological analysis.

*God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*, by David F. Wells (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 1994, 256 pages, hardback, \$19.99; *Consulting the Faithful: What Christian Intellectuals Can Learn from Popular Religion*, by Richard J. Mouw (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 1994, 84 pages, paperback, \$6.99. Reviewed by Michael Williams, Associate Professor of Theology.

In 1993 Wells wrote *No Place for Truth*, a broadside against what he called the "hollowing out" of the confessional underpinnings of modern evangelicalism and its acceptance of a psychological

and selfist view of reality and a utilitarian and managerial approach to the church. Wells diagnosed the root of the crisis of evangelicalism as a "sell out" to modernity, a wholesale acceptance of an ethos that

marginalizes religious confession to the periphery of a secularized world. Although he did not make any attempt to suggest a remedy for the ills of evangelicalism, Wells did promise that his next book would provide his prescription for a cure.

Unfortunately, *God in the Wasteland* fails to fully deliver on that promise. The vast majority of its content continues Wells' earlier Jeremiad. This is not to say that Wells' most recent effort is not worthy of attention. In many ways *God in the Wasteland* is a better book than *No Place for Truth*. The analysis has more biblical and theological depth, and the prose is more trenchant.

Wells' primary contention is simple. As evangelicals moved into the mainstream of American culture in the 1960s and 70s, evangelicalism as a movement lost its outsider status. Yet its cultural success was not an unmixed blessing, for evangelicals also began to confuse the claims of Christ with the ethos of secularist culture. Furthermore, this seachange took place almost without immediate notice, since the evangelical confession did not undergo the kind of alteration that made theological liberalism's journey down the same road so noticeable. Where liberalism redefined the nature of the Christian faith to complement late nineteenth and early twentieth century culture, evangelicalism has reconfigured the scope of the faith in order to make room for a cultural enterprise that is driven by non-Christian forces. Thus, outwardly the faith remains unchanged. The historic doctrine of God, for example, remains. What has changed is the place we assign to God in our lives. The transcendent, holy God of biblical revelation, the God who Calvin claimed is there *for us*, becomes a God who is merely there *for our satisfaction* (89-122).

Compartmentalizing his existence into disconnected realms, the modern evangelical travels amphibian-like between a private life in which God and religious confession are relevant, and a public life that is devoid of religious meaning. Wells finds a double error here: reducing the Christian faith to a single area of life, and the suggestion that other areas of life are not spiritual or religious in nature.

The failure of Wells' book lies right here. He is correct, I believe, in his identification of evangelicalism's reduction of the faith and its naive acceptance of an alleged neutral cultural ethos. But he fails to adequately relate the two sides of the problem. Perhaps I should say that he fails to properly open up a biblical response to the first part of the problem – the pietistic reduction of the faith to the

life of the inner man – and apply that response to the second – the nature of culture and evangelicalism's faulty synthesis of Christ and culture.

Wells has done a fine job of laying bare the nature of modern culture and evangelicalism's accommodation to that culture. The technological, political, and economic forces that underwrite modernity are spiritual forces, and they are forces that demand absolute religious affiliation. A Christian acceptance of the naturalist, materialist, and secularist forces of modernity necessarily reduces the scope of faith to the private and the internal. Such an agenda is nothing less than what the New Testament calls "worldliness" or what Scripture throughout simply calls "idolatry" (35-54).

The solution or remedy suggested by Wells is a hard one with which to argue – it's just so biblical. In truly prophetic fashion, Wells calls modern evangelicalism back to God, back to Scripture, back to the Reformation watchwords *sola scriptura* and *sola gratia*. Something has been lost, and it must be regained.

Wells' answer is correct, but it leaves the reader unsatisfied. Richard Mouw thinks he knows why. Wells has misrepresented the problem. His alternatives are too stark, too black and white: Christ or culture, God or the world. Appealing to both a Reformed doctrine of creation and a Roman Catholic incarnational theology, Mouw takes on Wells along with recent works by Mark Noll (*The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*) and Os Guinness (*No God but God* and *The American Hour*). Mouw believes that Wells, Noll, and Guinness have been too quick to dismiss popular evangelicalism. In fact, he suspects that they really do not like evangelicalism at all. A transformationalist view of culture demands not facile and unlivable alternatives – creation or redemption – but rather the redemptive light of Christ brought to bear upon creation. Thus the issue is not a psychological understanding of the self over against a biblical understanding, but asking what insight a biblical understanding has for psychological inquiry and the psychological dimension of reality.

Mouw has put his finger on the problem of Wells' book. Wells does not adequately address the question of how the gospel addresses the political or economic or psychological dimensions of life. In short, what was needed was not more theology but a biblical vision for all of life and a transformation of fallen culture. Wells confessed the relatedness of redemption to creation, but then failed to explicate it. It is not enough to call the people of God back to the cov-

enant – as necessary as that is. The biblical prophets spent just as much time proclaiming and demonstrating the necessity of the covenant for life in the world. Prophets remind the community of faith of the covenant, for it is there that obedience and faithfulness are to be found for all human endeavor.

But Mouw makes me far more uneasy than does Wells. Mouw wants to defend popular evangelicalism against those who decry its present fondness for the therapeutic and managerial. He does not deny that these tendencies exist. He embraces them. They are the necessary missiological conditions under which modern urbanized and individualized people hear the Gospel. The theologian does need to be more sensitive to where modern experience of the world begins. But Mouw comes dangerously close to confusing man's experience of the world with revelational normativity. His use of John Henry Newman's idea of the "sense of the faithful" as an extra-biblical control upon theological reflection is an example of exactly the kind of accommodationist and culturally ameliorative synthesis that Wells rightly finds suspect. Mouw suggests that the mystical body of Christ has such a natural "instinct" for practical wisdom that a good test of truth is whether it is accepted by the church (If it sells?) (23-26).

As much as Mouw would like to speak of the scope of the gospel as including or speaking to all dimensions of life, he, like Wells and Noll, places inordinate emphasis upon the theologian and the discipline of theology rather than the Christian thinker and the development of a Christian response to the world.

Mouw is less guilty of this error than is Wells and Noll, but one can come away from any of their recent works with the idea that if evangelicals only did theology properly they would be O.K. Yes, evangelicals need to return to the theological enterprise with renewed seriousness. But this is only part of the solution for a vigorous Christian presence in modern, secularized society; and it is perhaps a smaller part of the solution than Wells or Noll would like. Christians also need to be engaged in the arts, mechanical engineering, chemistry, banking, dentistry, plant science, carpentry, and all the rest of human cultural endeavor. And we need to be seeking the mind of Christ in each. What is required for a Christian approach to marketing, for example, is not a theology, but a biblically shaped worldview and a redemptive insight into the economic dimensions of obedient stewardship. To be sure, theological insights will assist the Christian business person as he seeks the mind of Christ in business, but theology can never be an alternative to or replacement for business skills. And theology is not the prolegomenon for Christian business, or the arts, or psychology.

Mouw is the president of Fuller Theological Seminary. And to no small degree, Fuller is one of Wells' targets insofar as Fuller has contributed to evangelicalism's fascination with psychology and church growth principles. Is it possible that Mouw has cast himself in the role of Amaziah to Wells' Amos? I am glad Amos did not read *Consulting the Faithful* before embarking on his mission to the Northern Kingdom.