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## Scattered Voice: Christians at Odds in the Public Square (Book Review)

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(2) the different Christian traditions, and (3) the theories of moral development in psychology. He then uses this foundational understanding to show how an individual conscience is formed and how this conscience makes moral decisions. Holmes then concludes with a third point emphasizing the need to develop character to complete moral education.

Initially I thought the author would suggest a specific process or formula by which a college could graduate "morally educated" students. He dissects objectively the elements involved in forming character in making moral decisions. This dissecting suggests a model that might guarantee that an ethical analysis process be followed. But, although this material provides good foundational knowledge and insight, it runs the risk of promoting a programmed approach to values-judgment and ethical analysis that requires the student to adhere to a defined process in order to make "ethically correct" decisions. This approach would be counterproductive as the student would then be judged on how he or she mastered a process rather a principle. Further, one senses that the college might be viewed as a "hospital" for the character-deficient

student. One wonders at what point it might be too late to inculcate moral character and values.

Holmes' writing of this book reflects an individual's documenting his development of thought. In the end, he emphasizes that developing moral character does not result from dos and don'ts but rather from "a pervasive condition of the heart, a question of moral identity" (59). He, therefore warns the Christian college about emphasizing behavioral rules rather than personal responsibility—a warning worthy of further reflection. In this light, he sees the college as responsible for setting goals and direction for the future rather than as a panacea for the present. He regards the college as one step in a process of developing Christian character.

*Shaping Character* does provide good material to contemplate and as a useful framework for discussion in faculty and administrative groups. It presents a case for the Christian college to make character development more tangible in its environment. In addition, it can help an individual reader integrate the building of Christian character with academic learning.

*The Scattered Voice: Christians at Odds in the Public Square* by James W. Skillen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House) 1990. \$9.95. Reviewed by Jasper Lesage, Associate Professor of Economics and Dean of the Social Science Division.

In *The Scattered Voice*, Jim Skillen provides a concise overview of diverse Christian voices in the political arena and challenges Christians to improve their efforts to promote justice. His descriptions of a variety of Christian approaches in political theory constitute the major part of the book and are significant in themselves. Just as important, Skillen's own framework creates a reference point for his descriptions of the various views and invites readers to move toward an active political agenda which promotes justice in a consistent, coherent, and biblical fashion.

After setting the stage, Skillen structures the book as a description and discussion of the formal and informal position of several Christian groups on the nature of Christian political activity. He organized the narrative on a traditional "most conservative to most radical" continuum, beginning with pro-American conservatives and placing theonomic reconstructionists, the most radical group, at the end of the continuum. Most readers will find the narrative very readable and informative. One drawback of the book's organization is its concession to the predominant conservative-radical framework, thus reducing the impact of Skillen's own approach, which tries to break from the traditional categories. Given Skillen's pur-

pose of encouraging debate, however, it appears to be a concession worth making to strengthen the book's impact on the Christian community.

Skillen has a more significant agenda than mere description, however. *The Scattered Voice* is a very practical book. It asks various Christian political groupings to justify their political philosophies in the light of the gospel interpreted in its original context and in the light of a modern differentiated society. No political theory passes muster which does not have practical application in that society. Every political theory must be assessed in light of the question, "Will it work?" Skillen has confidence that a theory truly based on the gospel will ultimately work.

Skillen argues that no political theory can ignore the fundamental premise of the Bible that the pursuit of justice is a given. Christians are not free to choose or not to choose justice, as if it were an option. The pursuit of justice is a life-long mandate (26). With this in mind, he outlines four basic requirements of a Christian political perspective:

1. It must allow us to deal with the full reality of politics and government.
2. It must come to grips with the real history of American politics.

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