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Insight, Authority, and Power: A Biblical Appraisal (Book Review)

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of the teaching of creation in the nation's schools---both public and private," according to one of the Dordt conferees. "Though much of what was said at the conference was not acceptable from a Reformed Christian perspective," noted the reporter, "the conference did sharpen our own views on Creation and helped us to bring to the classroom more clearly the mind of Christ regarding origins."

Scientists at the Creation Convention lectured on such subjects as "The Scientific Method," "Radioactive Dating," and "The Fossil Evidence." This Milwaukee conference was attended by educators, ministers, laymen, and students from many parts of the country.

Dordt is a member college in an organization called Colleges of Mid-America Consortium. This eleven-college organization is funded mainly with federal funds and has proved to be a popular source of conferences. Many of the sessions are interdisciplinary, and the Consortium has managed to provide a quality program. A good percentage of the Dordt faculty attend these meetings.

A workshop conference recently attended by Professors Maatman and Vander Zee resulted in setting up a Pre-Medical and Nurses' Training Advising Committee at Dordt. The workshop

held at the University of Nebraska in September was designed to aid institutions such as Dordt in providing counsel to students in pre-professional programs. Assisting in the workshop was an official from the American Association of Medical Colleges.

Dr. Maatman explained that the newly-formed committee at Dordt is prepared to perform these services:

(1) Advise students on proper procedures for entrance into the appropriate schools.

(2) Help the students choose schools.

(3) Guide the students in proper selection of courses at Dordt.

(4) Aid students in actually visiting schools they might attend.

The committee has already made it possible for a group of pre-professional students to visit the University of Iowa Medical School. This trip was made in connection with the annual Pre-Medical Conference at the Iowa City campus.

Despite some disappointment registered by faculty members contacted, it might be said that their general reaction was quite positive. A college community must stay abreast of what is happening in the academic world, and conferences continue to be a way to get in on the most recent academic thought and opinion.

BOOK REVIEW

Insight, Authority, and Power: A Biblical Appraisal by Peter Schouls (Wedge Publishing Foundation, Toronto, 1972--paperback, \$1.95). Reviewed by Merle Meeter.

In this 46-page booklet, Dr. Peter Schouls (author of Man in Communication and chairman of the philosophy department at the University of Alberta) explores the relationships between insight, authority, and power. His

thesis is that, "Insight or knowledge always gives one authority, and authority is never gained except through obtaining insight or knowledge." What Dr. Schouls is really getting at, as he says, is "what I believe should be involved in our concept of office" (p. 13; p. 14).

Schouls maintains that unless a man has Word-guided discernment or understanding, he has "no authority": "Those who are in positions

of power but have no knowledge of the will of God possess no authority." Here, then, is the thesis restated: "To the extent that one has insight to that extent one possesses authority." Hence, says Dr. Schouls, one consequence is that "parental power asserted on the basis of ignorance of the will of God is power illegitimately used, hence without authority and without the right to be heeded" (p. 22; p. 25; p. 26).

Also, continues the author, "There is no authority in either the officer or the non-officer members of a church as such." Therefore, "If the members of such a [church] community find their officers totally wanting in insight and authority, they have the duty not to follow or obey.... In such a situation, office will shift from those who may once have been elected or appointed to office to those who now serve through leadership" (II. 32-33; p. 33).

As to the home and the parent-child relationship, Dr. Schouls argues that, "Unless they themselves know the creator-redeemer God in his faithfulness, unless they understand his Word, they cannot possibly bring up their children in the fear of the Lord. Then they have no authority as parents.... Parents without insight into what the Word of God means for the maturing of their children simply don't possess the authority to exercise this power.... Parents act from authority only to the extent that they have insight" (p. 37).

Moreover, in applying his insight-authority-power thesis to the school, Dr. Schouls asserts that, "Since power, authority, and knowledge or insight go together, we can say that to the extent that the teacher has insight he has authority and ought to be able to exercise this in terms of power; and to the extent that the student has insight he, too, has authority which he ought to be able to exercise in terms of power.... If the student's insight exceeds that of the teachers, the student possesses authority, and power should be on his side" (p. 41).

Schouls summarizes his section on education with the following syllogism: "And because the best students want education, want to get to know what life is all about, and want to learn how to contribute to it, they want to exercise power. Someone had better concede

their authority" (p. 44).

Finally, ending his brief chapter "In Conclusion," Dr. Schouls observes that "Only those who gain knowledge of God as the creator-redeemer of life really know what reality is all about. They alone gain the authority which results in the power of redemptive action in all of a man's life" (p. 46 - emphasis added).

I have the following questions on this provocative essay:

1. Doesn't the Bible teach that God gives (or delegates) authority, according to His good pleasure, rather than that man gains authority by his insight or intelligence?

2. Dr. Schouls says that our Lord's disciples lacked insight, and, therefore, authority before Pentecost. Yet, the author quotes Luke 10:1-20, in which Jesus appoints the seventy (well before Pentecost) and says: "Behold, I have given you authority...." How can this evident contradiction be reconciled? (Doesn't Jesus also say of Himself, "All authority has been given Me...")?

3. Is it indeed Scripturally taught that all non-Christian parents and rulers, for example, have absolutely "no authority"? (How about Romans 13:1-2 in this connection?)

4. Who is "authorized" to determine whether the person claiming insight (based on "the understanding of the norms that hold for a particular area"--p. 45) and also, therefore, authority and power, really possesses authoritative knowledge?

5. Does insight and the desire "to exercise power" automatically imbue one with authority?

6. Is there not a danger here of intellectual elitism? That is, of some scholars or students presuming insight, and, therefore, of arrogating authority and power over their God-ordained pastors and elders, as well as over parents and all other Christian teachers?

Editor's Comment: A faculty committee is presently studying the subject of authority, particularly as it relates to education. On the basis of this study, a faculty position paper will be produced and published in Pro Rege in due time.