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Foreword by John H. White

GOD AND POLITICS

Four Views on the Reformation
of Civil Government



THEONOMY • PRINCIPLED PLURALISM
CHRISTIAN AMERICA
NATIONAL CONFSSIONALISM

Edited by
Gary Scott Smith

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before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government : Theonomy, Principled Pluralism, Christian America, National Confessionalism:

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. A Great Read, but one of these is not like the others By Adam T. Calvert
This book might not be readily accepted by some who are looking for very divergent views. For instance by the title of the book I was thinking there would be a case for Christian-democratic-liberalism, Christian-republic-rhetoric(ism), Christian-libertarianism, and yes maybe Christian-theonomy. While I think a book like that would've been helpful, since there are at least professing believers in each of those camps, I was very delighted with what I actually found in this work. According to the foreword, the book is comparing specifically Reformed views on Christian political theory. The subtitle Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government then takes on a slightly more telling meaning. And among those four views, with the inconsistent exception of one (which will be explained later), they are all saying the same thing - the law of God is to be the very foundation from which all our modern laws are to be derived. Theonomy: Ethically speaking, the Second Psalm portrays God responding to political opposition against Christ by calling upon the kings[and] judges of the earth to become wise and instructed (v. 10). It is utter moral foolishness to disobey the King whom Jehovah has enthroned. It is noteworthy that this verse is addressed, not simply to the magistrates of theocratic Israel, but to all of the kings and judges of the earth, even (especially) to those who dare to exercise civil rule in defiance of Jesus Christ. We cannot escape the clear biblical truth that each and every earthly ruler stands under the divinely established moral obligation to serve Jehovah with fear[and] kiss the Son (vv. 11-12). Serving the Lord with fear unquestionably means obeying His commandments (cf. Josh. 22:5; Ps. 119:112-126; Deut. 10:12-13). p. 30 Principled Pluralism: The dichotomy between the-private-as-religious idea and the-public-as-secular idea is wholly arbitrary and artificial. The public affairs of society and the state are no less religious than the so-called private affairs of individual, church, home, and school life. Since all of life is religion, and since the Bible as a book of religion speaks to life as a whole, the question is not whether but how the Bible speaks to issues of society and the state. The question is not whether Scripture addresses matters of public justice, but how it addresses them. p. 81 Christian America: I wish to show that it is in accordance with Scripture and, therefore, natural for Christians to try to establish central biblical, Christian values by law in our one large corner of this fallen world. The current American doctrine that our society must be pluralistic in the sense that all values and value judgments are equally acceptable, is self-contradictory and destructive. p. 127 National Confessionalism: Because Jesus has come, the time when God overlooks the ignorance of kings and nations is past! God now commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:30-31) The lesson is clear: God will no longer tolerate kings who blasphemously claim divinity. Jesus is now the ruler of all things, and he will not allow earthly kings to steal His glory. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (Matt. 28:18). That is the most important political fact of our time. p. 178 Three of these views are actually very close in principle to advocating the same position. And that becomes not only evident in the content itself but also the remarks made by the different contributors. For instance, Kevin Clauson's The Christian America Response to Theonomy basically agrees point by point with much of what Bahnsen advocated in his opening position. Clauson's beginning footnote in the article states: I accept the principle of theonomy, and I will direct my comments to certain related subjects with that presupposition in mind (p. 61). In Bahnsen's closing remarks, he states: Both H. B. Harrington (for the national confession position) and Kevin L. Clauson (for the Christian America position) have replied to my essay in a way that indicates that their perspectives agree essentially with the theonomic viewpoint. Despite peripheral variation in details of application, at the heart of our political theory and understanding as Christians, the theonomic, national confession, and Christian America positions are one. A key achievement of our consultation was that it disclosed this underlying unity among the three perspectives (p. 234). What Bahnsen goes on to say is what the reader naturally sees in his progress through the book anyway: that within the Reformed community today (even as in the Reformed heritage) the peculiar position is that of pluralism (p. 234). And Principled Pluralism is indeed the view that is not like the others. While above there were comments made by Gordon Spykman (representing the Principled Pluralism view) indicating that Christ is ruler over every aspect of life - including government and politics, the rest of the essay tries to demonstrate a very complex view of what that looks like in the different sphere-sovereignty outlooks he presents. His authority, then, for the state switches from the Lord Jesus Christ to society: The state has a specifically limited scope, bounded and balanced [not by Scripture but] by the rights of other societal groupings and spheres (p. 97). In other words, state justice is dictated by societal groupings and spheres rather than God's Word. It is no wonder that in application he ends up taking what God did not establish as civil law and advocates that it should be made civil law (Example: the government giving preferential treatment to the poor, p. 87, 88; contra Lev. 19:15) as well as civil laws that ought to be laws being advocated as abrogated (Example: giving an unbridled freedom of religion, p. 99 ; contra Deut. 13:6-10) - does he really think worshipers of Molech (or a similar modern religion) should be protected by the civil magistrate, even if part of their worship (freedom of religion) is to make their children pass through fire and die as a sacrifice to such a god? Whether he does or not, his view leaves that open if applied consistently. Nonetheless, with the exception of the

Principled Pluralism approach (which was severely dismantled by the responses from the other views as well as Bahnsen's major response at the end), all the other views are very close and truly the same in principle. There were minor disagreements regarding the history of America and how the founding fathers approached the foundations of government, as well as disagreements regarding specifics on how exactly the laws of Scripture ought to be applied today. But overall out of the 12 contributors (not counting the 4 advocates of Principled Pluralism), all of them had one very clear voice: the Law of the Lord ought to be the law of all societies. And that is simply Scripture applied (Deut. 4:8; Heb. 2:2; cf. Ps. 2:1-12). 0 of 4 people found the following review helpful. GreatBy DanielleWe purchased this book to be used with our homeschool curriculum. I'm anxious to use it this next school year. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. **AN EXTREMELY HELPFUL AND FAIR PRESENTATION OF FOUR REFORMED VIEWS** By Steven H Propp This 1989 book contains four different perspectives: Theonomy; Principled Pluralism; Christian America; and National Confessionalism. Each perspective is allowed to make a presentation, which is followed by responses from the other three positions; the book ends with a summary presentation from each position. (The book contains revised papers first presented at the June 2 and 3, 1987 "Consultation on the Biblical Role of Civil Government" conference held in Pennsylvania.) One essayist asks, "Further, it is not immediately obvious why the Synod of Jerusalem (Acts 15) imposed on Gentile believers the Mosaic prohibitions on eating food offered to idols... eating meat of strangled animals, and drinking blood... How can we say we are free from the Old Testament dietary laws if the New Testament prescribes them for us Gentiles?" (Pg. 59) Another suggests, "If it is true that Christian values really do promote the common good, it ought to be possible to convince enough people, Christian and non-Christian, to establish a Christian commonwealth in a way that safeguards the spirit or the rights of all of its citizens." (Pg. 149) Another argues, "A nation that does not explicitly acknowledge God's authority may administer justice more evenhandedly than a declaredly Christian state. Many modern democratic nations promote public justice better than did European nations during the centuries of Western Christendom." (Pg. 216) "Asked, 'Should we execute idolaters?' the Theonomist Greg Bahnsen admitted, 'I have not done sufficient homework and reflection on this question. Instead of talking about these theoretical things, we should work to end the slaughter of unborn children... and the state's continual intrusion into our lives... Killing idolaters is not the agenda.'" (Pg. 268) This is an extremely helpful book, for getting a better idea of these various perspectives, from a Reformed perspective.

What does the Bible say about civil justice? How is Christ King over the nations? Was America ever a Christian nation, and should it be one? Which Old Testament laws apply to civil life today? To what extent should the state tolerate non-Christian views and practices in the name of pluralism? These are some of the questions addressed by 16 contributors representing four positions on the biblical role of civil government. Originally delivered at a consultation on that topic, each of the four major papers is presented by a leading representative of that view and is followed by responses from the three other perspectives. The result is a vigorous exchange of ideas aimed at pinpointing areas of agreement and disagreement and equipping God's people to serve him more effectively in the political arena.

"The church has needed a scholarly work that dispassionately, yet biblically, examines the tension points that exist between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of our God. [The Consultation on the Biblical Role of Civil Government] has compiled such a work in *God and Politics*, which not only provokes thought but makes interesting reading." --Cal Thomas "The publication of this work indicates that a major change is under way in American churches. An area of life previously neglected is now the center of considerable interest and concern. All the contributors to some degree share a Christian concern with political order and the necessity for a Christian stance and action. Their comments deserve attention." --R. J. Rushdoony About the Author Gary Scott Smith (M.Div., Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; MA, PhD, Johns Hopkins University) is chair and professor of history at Grove City College in Pennsylvania.