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Who Really Cares: The Surprising Truth About Compassionate Conservatism (Book Review)

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no interest in drawing to the attention of his interlocutors the truth that *after* Kuyper, from about 1926 onwards, thinkers “in Kuyper’s line” from the Netherlands, such as Herman Dooyeweerd, brought far greater theoretical precision to concepts such as “sphere sovereignty,” which Kuyper is famous for discussing rhetorically. It seems as if Bolt wants to draw a line after Kuyper and Bavinck, as their more philosophically astringent successors are far less amenable to his patriotic purposes.

In some respects Budziszewski’s discussion of Francis Schaeffer (73-87) is more satisfactory. He certainly seems to be much more at ease with Schaeffer than with the Dutchman. It was Schaeffer who gave American evangelicals some notion of a great cultural divide—an antithesis, no less, that is central to much contemporary American understanding of the “culture wars” (74, 80-81). The in-depth basis for Budziszewski’s commitment to “natural law” is perhaps most effectively captured in his statement: “When people are closed to special revelation, the only possible appeal is to general revelation, to the things we can’t *not* know” (85). The context is his discussion of Schaeffer’s presuppositionalism. This draws our attention to a serious problem for the champions of “natural law.” Presuppositions differ because of the deep-level religious starting points that give rise to each different perception of reality—a state of affairs that ensures that there is no “common sense” way of understanding “natural law” that is supposedly the same for everybody. Significantly, Budziszewski finds Schaeffer’s presuppositionalism interesting because it was not wholly consistent (85-86)—an assertion that I would not contest but the validity of which is attributable to the influence of “common sense realism” on the texture of Schaeffer’s thought.

William Edgar’s discussion of Budziszewski on Schaeffer provides one of the best passages in the book (167-185). Edgar discusses Schaeffer’s conservative Americanism, his environmental awareness, his indebtedness to Hans Rookmaaker, and the implications of his pre-millennial eschatology. Edgar situates Schaeffer within the context provided by the “theonomy” of Rousas

Rushdoony and Gary North (167-168, 179-180). For Edgar, believers and unbelievers may have some perceptions and understandings “in common” “[n]ot because of natural law but because of common grace” (183). It seems to me that at this point, through the influence of Cornelius Van Til, Edgar sounds a more authentically Calvinian and reformational note than those who look back to “natural law” as understood by medieval Christendom.

Almost a century ago, in 1909, August Lang published a famous article entitled “The Reformation and Natural Law,” which still repays a close reading. There is no doubt that from the outset, many of the Protestant Reformers also thought in terms of “natural law.” Melancthon is a prime example. Yet it is also true that in Calvin the topic of natural law is approached with caution and reserve. Subsequently, others touched by the deeper implications of the Calvinistic reformation have preferred to speak of a law for creation, or of an order of creation subject to law, rather than of “laws of nature.” Kuyper affirmed Calvin’s picture of the scriptures as the spectacles through which we need to view the order of creation (ourselves not excluded)—not infallibly but in the right light and from the right standpoint. And for all this, the Holy Spirit speaking in scripture, to our hearts, is indispensable.

This is not an easy book, but it is part of an important ongoing conversation among Christians concerning the status of “natural law” in the “public square.” We Christians have come to a point where we realize that in a post-Christendom environment, “democratic” institutions of governance can meet the requirements of public justice, understood from a Christian standpoint, even though Christians cannot subscribe to the “democratic way of life” as such. However, we are also in circumstances in which we cannot avoid confronting the corrosive effects of secularization *and* the challenge of militant Islamic *jihad* simultaneously. Some readers will need to be more familiar with the participants in this continuing conversation before they can see the issues from the inside, but the effort is worth making. Our era cries out for Christian political thinking of the highest order. Are we ready to meet this call?

Brooks, Arthur C. *Who Really Cares: The Surprising Truth about Compassionate Conservatism*. New York: Basic Books, 2006. 250 pp. ISBN: 13:978-0-465-00821-6. Reviewed by Jack R. Van Der Slik, Emeritus Professor of Political Studies and Public Affairs, University of Illinois at Springfield.

Although the words do not appear in the title, charitable behavior is the central focus of Brooks’ book *Who Really Cares*. Certainly charitable behavior is a familiar concern to the readers of *Pro Rege*. Most of us have been enjoined from childhood to give offerings to worthy causes, not only to those of church and school but also to civic causes such as the United Way or tsunami relief. Indeed, we are aware that the Bible speaks much more about charitable behavior than it does about creation, hell, or the end times.

Despite that familiarity, we rarely cross paths with

analytical discussions of charitable behavior. Usually the concept comes up in matters of solicitation. Also, we understand charitable behavior as a particular expression of gratitude, a God-encouraged way to convey our thanks for the incredible gift of salvation that has come to us through Jesus Christ. Typically our empirical concerns are as simple as asking, “How is the ABC fund drive going? Has the goal been reached yet?” However, this book is based upon huge archival-data sets about contribution behavior and volunteer efforts that are cross-classified

with socioeconomic and political measures. One might, therefore, imagine that the book will offer therapy on a sleepless night. To the contrary, Brooks has surprising things to say. Instead of summarizing or interpreting, let me allow Brooks to speak for himself by quoting him directly:

[F]our forces in modern American life are primarily responsible for making people charitable. These forces are religion, skepticism about the government in economic life, strong families and personal entrepreneurship.(11)

When we look only at gifts of time and money to explicitly secular causes, how do religious and nonreligious people compare?... Religious people are more charitable in every measurable nonreligious way – including secular donations, informal giving, and even acts of kindness and honesty – than secularists. (38)

Family life is connected with charity in all sorts of ways. First, ... people who have children are more generous than people who don't.... A second fact about charity and families: Generous parents make for generous kids. (98-99)

The government's ability to redistribute income to increase economic equality, as useful and important as some people think this is, displaces the private responsibility some people feel to give voluntarily. Welfare payments suppress giving tendencies. And subsidies to nonprofit corporations "crowd out" private giving by changing the incentives of the givers. (162)

Different readers might have varying responses to these ideas. Is Brooks a sponsored and biased spokesperson for the Moral Majority? Are the statements straw men to be smashed by liberal triumphalism? Don't social and political liberals have more compassion for the poor than conservative religionists do? The short response is that Brooks is nobody's mouthpiece. He is a diligent social scientist, a professor of public administration at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. His particular research focus for more than a decade has been on various aspects of charitable behavior. He has published his research in several respected secular journals. This book includes a 23-page appendix, plus 28 pages of citations and footnoted explanations in which Brooks documents the data, social surveys, and statistical methods that are the basis for his rendition of facts and interpretations. Moreover, Brooks is candid to say,

When I started doing research on charity, I expected to find that political liberals – who, I believed, genuinely cared more about others than conservatives did – would turn out to be the most privately charitable people. So when my early findings led to the opposite conclusion, I assumed I had made some sort of technical error. I re-ran analyses. I got

new data. Nothing worked. In the end, I had no option but to change my views." (12)

Brooks' diligence with his analyses produces remarkable confirmation of a familiar biblical promise in Malachi 4:10 and following: "Bring the whole tithe.... Test me in this," says the Lord, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." Without putting his arguments in spiritual terms, Brooks offers a chapter entitled, "Charity Makes You Healthy, Happy and Rich." His writings offer a remarkable, if unintended, confirmation of God's faithfulness to his promises.

Brooks also makes comparisons regarding charity in European nations. Having found secularism and political liberalism associated with a dearth of charity, he states, unsurprisingly, "Even accounting for differences in standard of living, Americans give more than twice as high a percentage of their incomes to charity as the Dutch, almost three times as much as the French, more than five times as much as the Germans, and more than ten times as much as the Italians" (120). With remarkable consistency, Brooks finds that European countries with unstinting public welfare policies do not engender private charity in contributions of money or time.

Brooks' appraisal of charity leads him to articulate his view that people, whether conservative or liberal, who believe and act upon the importance of personal responsibility lead happy, healthy lives marked by charity in both money and time. They build families with children who learn generosity. They produce communities that are safe and prosperous. These are not the consequences of governmental requirements to redistribute wealth by entitlement programs and what is sometimes called "progressive" taxation. Brooks does not diminish the high responsibility of government to preserve freedom and regulate a just society. But government should encourage charity, which, Brooks concludes, "is critical for the provision of services all across the American economy, from religion to poverty relief to environmental protection" (183). He calls upon everyone, conservative and liberal, religious and secular, to engage in charity. Why? Because "even beyond what charity supports, it is an essential ingredient in our prosperity, health, happiness, and freedom. Charitable America improves life for all of us. Selfish America makes us all worse off" (183).

Brooks provides stunning and welcome arguments for Christian-conservative cultural and political perspectives. They demonstrate and confirm that voting for and supporting conservative political measures is not cold self-centeredness; rather, it is accompanied by generous, caring performance. Christian conservatism can offer an appropriate vision for a democratic society that does not deny mercy and compassion but instead supports it willingly. Government programs are not necessarily the best way to address social problems. Love expressed through Christian

institutions of mercy can have powerful consequences for those in need, not only for this life but for the life to come. Of course, it must be added that our charity is not simply for our causes; it is to give glory to God. Brooks provides a secular but compelling confirmation that God blesses lives of responsible praise, evidenced by charity. That is a good thing.

I find little to criticize about Brooks' work. His solid scholarship is well documented and explained, but informative footnotes are inconveniently accessed at the back of the book. More importantly, Brooks is rather cavalier about motivations for charitable actions. Rather dismissively he says, "...the giver's motive is irrelevant. Charity depends on behavior, not motive" (27). Despite his disregard for motives, the breadth of his findings suggests a rich vista for inquiry and analysis by sociologists that could have huge implications for causes that depend upon philanthropy.

Koetje, David S. (ed). *Living the Good Life on God's Good Earth*. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2006. 83 pages. ISBN 1-59255-292-7. Reviewed by Del Vander Zee, Professor of Biology and Environmental Studies, Dordt College.

This delightful book grew out of an extended workshop held at Calvin College in 2003, sponsored by Calvin's Seminars in Christian Scholarship. Its contents reflect the deliberations and convictions of thirteen Christian academics from across the U.S. and Canada. The book is a call to responsible and thoughtful discipleship in all of life, especially in the day-to-day living on a planet called Earth – the home of thousands of God's creatures and the handiwork of a providing Father, who has placed humankind as his image bearers (*imago dei*) to be caretakers. The book's short chapters are each a challenge to live thoughtfully and carefully in several areas, including our larger life-style and recreation choices as well as the specifics of the clothes we wear, the food we eat, and the energy we consume. Each chapter ends with a list of provocative questions, suggestions for further reading, and recommended resources or web sites. As such, the book is an excellent guide for individuals or small groups who seek to be disciplined biblically and sense the call to seek first the kingdom holistically.

The first chapter opens with an excellent, concisely written summary of biblical teachings for Earth care. Although it does not take up the argument, this chapter clearly answers any concerns often cited by Christians who are wary about Earth care sliding into Earth worship. To the contrary, "Earth care is part and parcel of what it means to be Christian! At stake is nothing less than the loving care of the earth and its creatures, a proper understanding of God, and the integrity of our faith itself" (13). Strong words, I first thought on reading this passage. How might this be so? On further reflection, I can suggest that unless Christian

Who will care to read Brooks' stunning findings? Of course, this work will be required reading for those with professional interests in philanthropy. But anyone concerned with contemporary American culture needs to know what this book reveals about the American people. We live in an era in which most "news" is bad news. Social critics mostly picture Americans as wasteful, selfish, consumptive, materialistic, parochial, and inconsiderate, among other terms of denunciation. However, much has been written about American exceptionalism—how America is unique and different from Asian and European cultures. Brooks has brought attention to American charity as a significant strand of that culture. He has measured its extent and explained its consequences. He has even suggested several public policy recommendations that could flow from it. Charity is a dimension of exceptional America that merits consideration, understanding, and authentic applause.

life is grounded in the created order and recognizes our co-dependence with the non-human creation (in light of Genesis 2:15), we tend to become arrogant and dualistic and to relegate God to our spiritual life, letting market-driven mammon call the shots for everyday life.

Given the title, with its playfulness in wording, the book goes far beyond the perfunctory "lets do more recycling," which is the extent of action and imagination too often offered by Christians when environmental or Earth-care topics are raised. A basic strength of this book is that it draws on the insights and practiced experience of people from diverse areas—biology, chemistry, geography, theology, environmental science, consumer science, and human kinetics—and a dean for research. These strengths appear as the authors bring the reader into the ecological connections of living. The clothes we wear are connected to sweat shops in the two-thirds world and to shoddy environmental stewardship as world-wide resources enter the globalized chain of stuff we purchase in big-box stores. The ecological connections are fairly easy to trace. Does/should moral culpability also follow these connections to the homes and urban landscapes we live in? How not, if this is our Father's world, argue the authors.

The book integrates and ends with another important theme, namely shalom – the kingdom of God characterized by "peace and justice, compassion and delight" (79). That peace, justice, compassion, and delight extend to all God's creatures, living and non-living, so that all may flourish in doxology to their maker. In this regard, I really appreciate the opening and ending chapters, as they provide two very strong parentheses around seeds for thoughtful and care-