
Pro Rege

Volume 15 | Number 1

Article 5

September 1986

Transforming Vision (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Adams, Charles C. (1986) "Transforming Vision (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*:

Vol. 15: No. 1, 31 - 32.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol15/iss1/5

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Book Reviews

by Russell Maatman

Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision*, Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984, 214 pp, \$6.95. Reviewed by Charles C. Adams, Dordt College Engineering Department.

In 1967, during my last year as an undergraduate college student, a friend gave me a copy of Hendrik Hart's *The Challenge of Our Age*. It was the first book which for me argued in terms I could understand that our faith in Christ ought to give direction to every area of life, not only those which we label as "religious." My engineering education, while technically exciting, had lacked the integrating quality necessary to piece together the various elements of life as I experienced it. How did chemical engineering, the Vietnam War, married life, a job in industry, and "church life" all fit together? Unable to embrace the positivist faith of my professors and fellow students and ill-prepared by a theologically reformed but essentially other-worldly church upbringing, I recognized in Hart's book the articulation of a biblical world view which would help me pull together the various areas of life into a unified whole. After reading it I immediately looked for other books like it. During the next five years I found a number of them, books like Stanford Reid's *Christianity and Scholarship*, Evan Runner's *The Relation of the Bible to Learning*, and Van Riessen's *A Christian Approach to Science*. All of these books had one theme in common; they attempted to show the implications of a Christian world view for different areas of life. After 1972, however, the number of these books being published decreased. That decrease paralleled what might be observed as a decrease in the sensitivity of Reformed Christians to the secularizing influence of the culture around them. Speaking for my generation, our sensitivity to cultural influences paralleled that of our secular peers, but was distinguished, we would like to think, by a focus on the development of a radically biblical world view rather than on drugs and revolution. Since that time, however, we have become less and less distinct from the society around us. Like the hippies of the late sixties, we have been satisfied with making minor changes in our world, and for the most part have accommodated ourselves to it. A manifestation of this is the scarcity of books being published like those of the late sixties mentioned above. A much more serious consequence is that our own children, just now coming of age, are doing without the benefit of a timely, clearly articulated, biblical world view. We are in danger of failing to pass on to the next generation that vision of the Kingdom which can provide the only true direction for life in the eighties and nineties.

But, thankfully, this is now beginning to change. During

the past two years at least a half dozen books have been published which provide just the kind of clear articulation that we have lacked over the past decade. These books are founded solidly on a biblical, Christian perspective and attempt to deal with the application of a Christian world view to our lives in ways that are both current and exciting. Perhaps the best of these is Walsh and Middleton's book. It attempts to create an appreciation for the significance of world views, to describe the contours of a Christian world view, and to distinguish that Christian world view from that of the culture around us.

The book is divided into four parts. In the first part the authors attempt to clarify the nature and significance of world views. They do so in a very down-to-earth way by contrasting the manner in which people from different cultures carry out some rather common activities, activities such as bathing a baby, for example. They make clear to us that even the most mundane thoughts and acts are carried out by the direction of a world view, and that if we look carefully enough we can begin to discern that directing influence. After clarifying the significance of a world view, the authors explore its relationship to one's faith commitment. In a way, this is where the authors lay down the guidelines for the rest of the book. They assert that a faith commitment is the way we answer four basic questions: Who am I?, Where am I?, What's wrong?, and What is the remedy? They make it clear that "the life of every person presupposes answers to these basic faith questions" (35) and that these answers, either consciously or unconsciously, form the foundation of one's world view.

In the second part of the book the authors attempt to describe a biblical world view. They do this, however, with a refreshing degree of humility. They make clear that it makes no sense to speak of one "correct" world view. Rather, we should speak of world views which are continually being reformed by the Word of God and the power of the Spirit.

We have implicitly suggested here an attribute of a "good" world view: it recognizes its own finitude and limitations. It is open to learn from other visions of life...We dare not let our world view become fixed. It must be informed constantly by reality and, if we are Christians, by an increasing understanding of revelation, the Word

With this in mind, the authors show that a Christian world view must be based on creation, it must acknowledge the fall, and that it is transformed by redemption. Without becoming bogged down in a lot of theological abstractions, they consistently make use of Scripture to give credence to their points. A good example is in a chapter dealing with creation. Quoting from Jeremiah, they go on to say that

...God's relationship with day and night, heaven and earth, is as much a covenant as is his relationship with his people. And this covenant is linked explicitly with the fixed regularities of creation which God established and appointed. Creation is a covenantal response to God's word. Just as the Torah, or Law, was given to Israel in the context of a covenant relationship, so God's laws and ordinances for all creation are covenantal. The entire universe is intimately related and bound to Yahweh, and he lovingly cares for his world. (50)

Likewise, Walsh and Middleton use both Genesis 2 and Revelation to make the crucial point that there is a natural progressive character to creation, in contrast to the dualistic view which assumes that the perfection of Eden indicates no need for change, and that cultural development is the result of the Fall.

This eschatological movement from the garden to the city was intended by God. True, the Fall has occurred in the meantime; sin has entered the picture. Nevertheless, the vision of Revelation 21 and 22 portrays a world purified from the Fall and its effects. And development remains a part of the purified world. (58)

The authors next turn to describing the modern world view. Part three is divided into four chapters. The first two identify the chief characteristic of the modern world view, namely, dualism, and describe how this came about in history. It is immediately made clear that the problem of dualism afflicts the church as well as modern culture. Beginning with a quote from Luke 4, where Jesus opens the Scriptures and reads from the prophet Isaiah, the authors ask

Where then is the gospel? If the kingdom of heaven is at hand, why don't the poor hear some good news for a change? Why aren't captives set free? How do we account for our failure, as members of the body of Christ, to exhibit the attributes of citizens of the kingdom? ...If the biblical world view is unique, and if it is radically different from the world view in secularized culture, then why do Christians fit so well into our culture? Why doesn't our life of discipleship and obedience make us appear as cultural oddities. (94)

What makes this book particularly effective is that the authors do not stop after merely asking these questions. They spend the next two chapters answering them.

After carefully describing the rise of the secular world view in history and how it came to influence the church, the authors turn to identifying the primary manifestations of that world view in our modern society—as they call it, the gods of our age. The last chapter in the third part deals with three "isms": scientism, technicism, and economism. Without resorting to an other-worldly rejection of science, technology, or economics, the authors show how these areas of our lives have been perverted by the secular world view and how they are in desperate need of redemption. This is the section of the book which will probably cause the most problems for many Christians. No one committed to "enlightened self-interest," "unlimited technological growth," or "scientific truth" will come away unscathed. Like the prophets of the Old Testament, the authors do not mince words when discussing "establishment disobedience."

The fourth and last part of the book is entitled "The Biblical World View in Action." In it the authors point to the beginnings of a Christian cultural response that can bring healing to our world. Two points are especially worth mentioning. First, the authors make very clear the need for viewing our work with the same perspective that we use for the rest of our life. Second, the authors clearly condemn any individualist notion that we can serve the cause of the Kingdom without the help of the body of Christ. On this latter point, the following quote is worth noting:

A doctor says, "I know that patients are treated as objects because the medical establishment has made gods out of the scientific method and technological efficiency. But what can I, one lonely Christian general practitioner do?" The answer? Nothing! By yourself you can do nothing in the kingdom of God. Just as our renewal in the image of God is communal, so our task of implementing a Christian cultural vision is communal. ...We need community not only because the problems are so big but because we are the body of Christ. We experience our individuality primarily in terms of our unique contribution to the body. (160)

This is not the kind of book that you can read and then comfortably go back to living your life in the same old uncritical manner. It is the kind of book we need to help us live more obediently, to help shed some gospel light on our modern world of darkness, and to help us pass the kingdom vision on down to the next generation. While the book was written with college students in mind, it is very readable and appropriate for any Christian who cares about what it means to be in the world but not of it. It would be an excellent book for group discussion purposes. Let's hope this is only the first of many books which will speak to the next generation in modern, and down-to-earth terms, but with enthusiasm regarding our reformational world view.