
Verhey teaches religion at Hope College. The book’s five parts (introduction, medical ethics, sex and gender, economics, and political ethic) seek to apply the Bible and early church teachings to contemporary ethical issues. Verhey thinks Christian ethics should be based, not on moral codes, but on the discernment of the Christian community based on the Bible’s ethical teaching in stories.

Verhey emphasizes that in terminal illness the patient’s suffering should not be extended. He deplores the neglect of the patient’s welfare caused by some advanced medical technology. He might have added that the problem involved in terminal illness is often caused by the patient’s family leaving decisions to doctors. Also, patients who participate in experimental treatments may benefit future patients.

Verhey takes the egalitarian view about gender role. He praises Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale to disparage those who take the opposite view. He notes that Jesus said nothing about homosexuality and that the phenomenon of sexual orientation was not known to biblical writers. Jesus’ silence regarding homosexuality may have resulted because he lived in a Jewish culture where homosexuality was not a problem.

Verhey is ambivalent about capitalism. He criticizes classical capitalism, but realizes that economic policy cannot be decided by pure ideology. He emphasizes that Christians must remember the poor because Jesus cared about them. One wishes that Verhey emphasized more the responsibilities of the poor to work and of the public to provide means for the poor to be educated and trained. The example of Asian economic success provides a lesson about the importance of education. The solution for the Third World totalitarian societies may not reside only in liberation theology, but also in a Puritan work ethic.

Verhey emphasizes the concept of theocracy in the political arena and rejects pacifism. He interprets theocracy different from Calvin’s practice and identifies it with the lordship of Christ in all areas of life. He claims that Jesus shifted emphasis from rules for conduct to the formation of character. One would differ here because Jesus said that he completed the law, so what Jesus really did was a shift from ceremonial to ethical law. Verhey applies the concept of theocracy in health policy and promotes universal access to health care.

Overall Verhey stands between liberal and conservative evangelicals. He blames the Enlightenment, instead of liberal theology, for moral deterioration in American society. He accepts the conclusions of biblical higher criticism. He borders on placing community above the Scriptures and gives general guidelines without providing detailed deliberations. For example, he omits dealing with hard questions such as: when should medical treatment be withheld from the terminally ill, to what extent should health care be provided, and to what degree can the welfare system be limited without neglecting the needy? Despite these reservations, Verhey’s book can be recommended as exploring a Christian position on contemporary ethical issues.

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FAITH & SCIENCE


Sire, former editor of Inter-Varsity Press, is also the author of several books. For Sire fans, it is always good news that another book from his pen is now in print. They will not be disappointed in this book, for it lives up to what we have come to expect. I am still amazed at the sheer magnitude of the number of books he has read. The endnotes number thirty pages of references in small print! Sire writes: "The primary goal in this book is to encourage you to think more and better than you did before reading it, to strive toward the perfection of the intellect, to enjoy the proper habits of the mind." (p.11) Sire states also that "this book is about the integral value of the intellectual life."

Sire quotes Richard Hofstadter who lists the following qualities that characterize intellectual life: fresh observations, free speculation, creative novelty, radical criticism, generalizing power and disinterested intelligence. Sire then adds this observation: "A Christian intellectual is one who is all of the above to the glory of God."

In chapter two, Sire writes that John Henry Newman (1801-1890) has become a model as a Christian intellectual. He explains that the experience of reading two of Newman’s works, Apologia Pro Vita Sua and The Idea of a University, while a graduate student at the University of Missouri were major factors in his selection. I would have selected C. S. Lewis as my model for a Christian intellectual. My reason is that I believe Lewis’s world view is more biblical than Newman’s, and his writings were at least as excellent as were Newman’s. However, I have read more of Lewis’s books than Newman’s. Sire himself admonishes us (pp. 166-7) to seek out the world view of the author of any book we read. I have not read all of Newman’s writings, but from the extensive quotations from Newman that are cited here, I deduce the following about Newman’s view of the world.

Since Newman lived in the Victorian era, he apparently adopted the utopian, optimistic world view of that era. Key literary figures of that era (besides Newman) were Robert Browning and Alfred Lord Tennyson. Browning believed in the perfectionibility of mankind. He proclaimed exuberantly, "God’s in his heaven,--all’s right