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J. Philip Wogaman. *Christian Perspective on Politics*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000. Pp. X + 374. \$29.95 (Paper).

[1] Wogaman's thesis is that Christians should be engaged in the body politic. Beginning from the notion that the state is "society acting as a whole" (15), he contends that Christians can not avoid political involvement if for no other reason than they are part of society. Therefore they are necessarily a part of whatever society does (or does not do). However, Wogaman is not satisfied with mere acquiescence to state power. He argues for active involvement on the part of Christians, one informed by their faith.

[2] After laying out the book's thesis in part one, Wogaman turns, in part two, to a consideration of the most useful set of principles for guiding Christian political activity. Analyzing alternatives offered by several distinct Christian perspectives, he concludes those related to "mainstream Christian" thinking best serve this purpose. While there are elements of truth in each of the perspectives, the core problem of most is that they permit too great a division between the community of faith and the broader society within which it is imbedded. "Mainstream Christianity" alone permits an integration of the two, owing to its more inclusive notion of covenant. Since God's grace extends to all, not just the Christian community, God is active in all of society. Recognizing this, Christians must be as well.

[3] In the remainder of the book, Wogaman considers how Christians should engage in the political space. He begins part three by identifying ten "theological entry points," intended to serve as guides for resolving questions concerning appropriate Christian responses to political issues. Among them are covenant, the theology of the cross, and Christian eschatology (there is a divine purpose, which political involvement can help fulfill). He concludes part three by considering broad issues related to good government. In part four, Wogaman develops a Christian response for a host of public policy issues (to include state provision of goods and services, social protection for the needy, environmental policy, education, affirmative action, abortion, and capital punishment). The response in each case is determined by an application of the ten "theological entry points."

[4] As a social scientist I think it best to avoid the purely theological aspects of Wogaman's book, if for no other reason than to show proper respect for disciplinary autonomy. I wish to focus instead on Wogaman's view of citizens and the democratic state, neither of which exists in the real world. (In the language of the social sciences, they lack an empirical referent.) Any prescription for political action is of questionable value to the degree it is based on a false understanding of those intended to carry out that action. Just as importantly, any argument on how to best engage democracy is of limited value if the democracy one has in mind is only theoretically related to the one in which citizens actually live.

[5] The first problem I see is that Wogaman holds to an extraordinarily idealistic view of citizens. This is most evident in his discussion of the ten "theological entry points." We are told that there is no clear-cut procedure for weighting or determining the application of the principles. How do we deal with this problem? We must engage in "presumptive" application prepared at any moment to "think more deeply" and "reflect" more thoroughly when mistakes result (175). This is all well and good (perhaps) for an academic or a theologian. But can we really expect the average citizen to do this? In fact, social scientists have known for over half a century that the average citizen possesses neither the interest nor the capacity to engage in the kind of thinking and reflection required to engage in developing public policy.

[6] This brings us to the second problem. Wogaman's conception of democracy is a normative one virtually devoid of institutions. Even if we assume that all citizens either desired to engage in helping to determine public policy or had the prerequisite intellectual capacity to do so, were they to attempt to do so, any polity would be rendered ungovernable. Majority rule in the sense that all citizens (or even a substantial portion) actively engage in policy formulation is in fact impossible! This assertion can be tested in any meeting. Merely ask those present on what date and time they would like to meet next. There is a high probability that no one option will be chosen by a majority of the group. Further, if one is chosen, there is an even higher probability that any number of alternatives subsequently offered will defeat the proposal that had commanded a majority. The result is that the group cannot reach a decision.

[7] The solution to the dilemma is to adopt rules that have the effect of imposing an end to the process. I am sure that Wogaman is aware of this fact. However, his ideal democracy is peculiarly devoid of rules, particularly in their institutional form. While he does discuss institutions, he focuses primarily on the family, the church, or interests groups. But these are social institutions. They are not political institutions, and after all that is what his book is about. How do Christian citizens interact with the state? When they do so, they do not interact with some abstract entity, they engage a set of purposively political institutions, which includes courts, legislatures, executives, bureaucracies and the like. These institutions act in accordance with a set of rules, and the rules ensure that we are able to achieve an outcome.

[8] When Wogaman does address institutions of state power, he treats them as aberrations of democracy itself. For instance, he identifies as problematic that committee chairs in Congress exercise power disproportionate to the proportion of the population they represent (219). The problem is that if they did not have disproportionate power, we would

not be able to arrive at any decision on public policy. Committee chairs serve to impose order on the policy process so that democracy (in its empirical form) can exist at all.

[9] Despite these problems, it nevertheless remains that Wogaman's book provides us with very useful normative insights on politics derived from liberal Christianity. That is particularly the case when he deals with general issues such as just war and a Christian's relationship and responsibility to the state. However, I would caution against adhering to its conclusions regarding Christian responses to specific issues of public policy given the disconnect between the theoretical concept of democracy advanced by the book and the empirical reality that *is* democracy.

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