

**Budziszewski, J. *The Revenge of Conscience: Politics and the Fall of Man*. Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 1999. 184 pp. \$22.95 hardcover.**

What intrigues me about this book is its starting point: human beings are sinful creatures. Sin is not frequently discussed these days, even among Christians. In fact, my parish priest rarely uses this expression. I cannot think of another recent reflection on politics that attempts to consider the significance of our fallenness. Many of the recent Christian reflections on politics adopt a "what-would-Jesus-do" approach. This approach can be seen, for example, in encouraging Christians to imitate Jesus in exercising a preferential option for the poor. This approach is at least partially problematic, however, because political life does not regard sinless divine creatures. In fact, political life consists in establishing proper order among fallen creatures. This book, then, is a thoughtful and much needed reflection on our fallenness and how it relates to political life.

Budziszewski presupposes rather than argues that we are fallen. Thus I doubt that the non-Christian would be moved by the arguments of this book. The audience for this book is instead the Christian who has forgotten or not realized the full significance of our fallenness. It is also written for those Christians who have placed too much hope in politics. He demonstrates that there are many such individuals who occupy all parts of the political spectrum.

Budziszewski writes in order to reach this audience and does so effectively. In this respect, *The Revenge of Conscience* reminds me of the work of Peter Kreeft. Kreeft frequently takes important Christian themes and communicates them in a thoughtful and readable manner to a broad audience. Budziszewski does the same here. He has written a work that could be read by scholars and the general public alike. He also writes in a manner that is not exclusively within a single faith tradition; it could appeal to both Catholics and Protestants.

Budziszewski begins the work by discussing the general significance of the fall: 1) we do wrong; 2) we think incorrectly; and 3) our efforts to rectify sin are affected by sin. He rightly notes that some deny the fall, such as Marxists, feminists and post-modernists. More importantly, he argues that some ignore the fall, such as conservatives and liberals. Also, at the beginning of the book, there is valuable discussion of the conscience and its impact on human behavior. This discussion of the conscience is complemented by an even better discussion of the conscience found in the final chapter of the book.

To this reviewer, the three most interesting chapters of the book were the criticisms of communitarianism, liberalism and conservatism. The author does not extensively discuss these political ideologies. There is no history of each viewpoint, nor does Budziszewski point out in detail the different versions of each. The chapter on communitarianism, it should be noted, does distinguish a few different sets of communitarians because communitarians differ so widely.

At first reading I thought the lack of discussion of these movements was a problem. The author, however, did not intend to present a history of contemporary American political viewpoints. Instead, he wanted to present general tendencies within each group from the perspective of someone who takes sin seriously. He does not attack straw men. He is aware that not every conservative or every liberal is guilty of every error he cites.

He persuasively argues that communitarians have no certain foundation because the various versions of communitarianism depend only on shared experience, which changes from community to community. He speaks of accountable communitarianism, which includes prominent figures such as Amitai Etzioni, who asserts that schools should provide moral education based on shared American experience. Budziszewski then rightly states that Etzioni's recommended values "reflect not so much external and overriding criteria based on shared human experience" as much as "a watery compromise among our warring subcultures."

He charges that liberalism is guilty of eight moral errors: propitiationism, expropriationism, solipsism, absolutionism, perfectionism, universalism, neutralism, and collectivism. Propitiationism is the error of giving people what they want, instead of what they need. Expropriationism is taking from one to give to another. Solipsism is forgetting that there are other beings besides humans. Absolutionism is excusing people for the evil that they do. Perfectionism believes that humans can be perfected. Universalism forgets the differences among human beings. Neutralism is suspending all judgments about good and evil. Collectivism makes the state absolutely sovereign over human affairs.

Conservatism is also guilty of eight errors: civil religionism, instrumentalism, moralism, Caesarism, traditionalism, neutralism, mammonism, and meritism. Civil religionism is the error of believing that America is a chosen nation. Instrumentalism argues that religion should be used to support the state. Moralism is the idea that the state through practices such as school prayer should support religious practice. Caesarism denies the validity of divine law. Traditionalism means accepting the past as correct. Neutralism is the failure to offer moral judgments. Mammonism is thinking only in terms of economics. Meritism means that people are only treated as

they deserve. These criticisms should make every conservative think more carefully about his conservatism.

As an academic, I would have liked footnotes or some form of citation. I wanted to read some of the passages cited, not in order to verify, but to get greater information. The book also lacks a bibliography. It is likely that these features, commonly found in academic books, were not included because a broader audience was intended.

These shortcomings are minor inconveniences compared with the overall quality and thoughtfulness of this book that challenges one to think about human sinfulness in the world. Most significantly, the recognition that we are fallen creatures reminds us of the need for eternal salvation, and realizing this need makes us understand that politics has limited ends.

-Michael Coulter  
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**Craycraft, Kenneth R. *The American Myth of Religious Freedom*. Dallas: Spence Publishing, 1999. 226 pp. \$27.95 hardcover.**

Some books advance our understanding by discovering new information or by bringing to our attention the thought of a long-neglected thinker. Others do so by taking "old" thoughts or information and either asking new questions or arranging the information in a way that compels us to see the old in a new light. Kenneth Craycraft's *The American Myth of Religious Freedom* falls in the latter category. All of the writings Craycraft examines--Locke's *Letter on Toleration*, Jefferson's "Statute on Religious Freedom", Madison's "Memorial and Remonstrance", John Courtney Murray's *We Hold These Truths*, and the Second Vatican Council's "Declaration on Religious Freedom"--are familiar to scholars, as is the "story" they tell. This story can be summarized as follows: After centuries in which religious freedom was but a dream, a handful of liberal thinkers began to lay the intellectual foundations for a theory of religious freedom. Taking their bearings primarily from Locke, Jefferson and Madison both improved upon the theory, for example, by granting religious freedom to Catholics as well as Protestants, and then implemented it, first in the state of Virginia and then, through the First Amendment, in the rest of the country. On the Catholic side, Murray's importance is measured, first, by his success in convincing his co-religionists to drop their hostility to religious freedom and, second, as one of the thinkers who shaped Vatican Council II's Declaration on Religious Freedom (hereinafter: Declaration), which essentially "baptized" the First Amendment.