

## BOOKSHELF

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*Politics for Christians: Statecraft as Soulcraft.* By Francis J. Beckwith. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010. Pp. 175. \$20.00 (paper). ISBN: 9780830828141.

Francis Beckwith's central goal in *Politics for Christians* is to provide college-level students with an introduction to politics, and specifically the delicate interaction between Christianity and politics. The volume addresses the concern and contention of many American Christians that they are expected to check their faith at the door and that their religious beliefs should not be allowed to influence public policy. Beckwith challenges this position by advancing Aristotle's argument that statecraft is soulcraft.

His thesis position is that "the state or government, by its policies, procedures and actions, places moral ideas in the social and legal fabric of a political regime, and that these ideas serve to shape the quality of its citizens' character" (36). This understanding of politics is central to the book and, according to Beckwith, it is also central to a proper Christian understanding of politics. Beckwith sets his project within a historical context of the evolving efforts of Christian churches to engage with the state.

In his treatment of the relationship between church and state, one of Beckwith's recurring refrains is that Christians must look to the whole of the church's developing tradition and its dialogue with state and government. With that long history as his starting point, coupled with the apparent contemporary consensus that church should be kept separate from the state, Beckwith provides an introductory yet comprehensive survey of Christian engagement in politics.

Beckwith begins by providing a bird's eye view of the different fields of the academic study of politics. This opening chapter is likely the most useful to college students considering a degree in the study of politics. Next, Beckwith works to provide a definition of liberal democracy. He begins with the view that liberal democracies are new to human society and that Christians have largely accepted liberal democracy, because it provides them the liberty to worship, political accountability, and opportunity to participate as citizens, as well as being based in a view of human dignity that is consistent with a Christian worldview (chapter 5).

The bulk of the book focuses on considering the history of the separation of church and state in America and defending a legal theory that supports *both* religious liberty and participation by religious citizens (chapter 3). In considering the interaction between the ideals of Christian citizens and liberal democracy, Beckwith argues that it is ultimately impossible for the state to be "neutral" (chapter 4) and defends the views that natural law has a place in public discourse and that natural rights and human dignity are best accounted for by a Christian, theistic framework (chapter 5).

In his aim to be thorough and rigorous in his reasoning, Beckwith sometimes repeats himself unnecessarily. Despite this minor stylistic flaw, *Politics for Christians* is an excellent introduction to the academic study of politics and Christian involvement therein.

WME

doi:10.1017/jlr.2015.7