

money from one person to give to another person? Without an analysis as rigorous as what he has constructed in the realm of economics, his political recommendations ring relatively hollow. For example, with respect to gambling, he recommends that Christians pursue a wide array of governmental interventions—without adequately discussing whether those proposals are either ethical or practical solutions to the problems that he associates with gambling. In all this, the reader is left with what appears to be “a value-free worldview toward the acceptability of the activity itself [that] is absurd” (173).

*Bulls, Bears, and Golden Calves* has much to commend it—in particular, a strong analysis of economic issues and a call to a worldview on economic issues that is consistent with Scripture. Stapleford leaves his audience with the vital message that we must avoid the allure of materialism, the pursuit of efficiency and profit-maximization above all other goals, and the idolatry of sterile economic analysis. Christians are called to self-sacrifice, not to simplistic utility-maximization. And we are called to hard-headed but soft-hearted economic analysis, based on a holistic understanding of what it means to be human—from sin nature to the inherent dignity of the human person.

D. Eric Schansberg

*Indiana University, New Albany*

## **Going Public: Christian Responsibility in a Divided America**

**Lawrence E. Adams**

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2002 (192 pages)

The aim of this book is to enable an active, informed Christian to understand public life more fully and to consider the resources that can be utilized for confronting this world. There is no attempt to present a comprehensive political or social theory for the Christian in this book. Adams, who holds a Ph.D. in government from the University of Virginia and after teaching at a Christian college is now a researcher at Virginia, states in the introduction that the aim of this book “is to explore the insights of recent research on the public role of American Christianity and to signal the church regarding the state of the public culture in which it resides” (17). He adds that the book is intended primarily for “Christian leaders and informed laity,” but he hopes that scholars will find his analysis useful.

The book seems to fulfill Adams’s intended purpose, but as such it is only a first step for Christian leaders and informed members of the laity. That is, the book presents data and analysis about the state of public culture so that one does not misunderstand the present state of American culture. While not offering a comprehensive work, this is a vitally important task. One cannot exercise practical wisdom, which Aristotle considers to be the virtue for a political actor, until one has knowledge of what is. Some polit-

ical theorists, such as John Rawls, present a political project in the abstract and then construct a political project based on abstract principles. Others may begin by presenting political aims that are based on incorrect assessments of social realities. It seems that this is the problem facing those who advocate for a “Christian America” because the present America has changed dramatically from its earlier Christian culture. In either case, the Rawlsian or the defender of “Christian America,” incorrect practical judgments will be made because of a lack of knowledge of what is.

Part 1 presents a useful account of present political realities. The first chapter provides excellent definitions of terms used by those examining present social realities. Here Adams helps the reader understand the meaning of public culture and political culture, public philosophy and political philosophy, and public theology and political theology. The definitions and discussion of these terms will be useful for students of political science or theology.

The next chapter seeks to describe the intellectual setting for contemporary American politics. He begins by describing the political legacy of the Reformation because European settlers brought the ideas associated with that legacy to the United States in the seventeenth century. There follows a short discussion of Catholic political ideas. While Adams states that he is not attempting to argue for one view over the other, it would be useful if he had augmented the discussion of Reformation and Catholic views with some discussion of later developments of these views. For example, a brief discussion of some of the key concepts in Catholic social teaching would be useful. It would also be useful to supplement this discussion of public life with, at least, a brief account of significant ideas in political economy.

An account of American social life comes in the next two chapters and consists mainly of analysis of social science data. Here he presents data showing Americans as highly privatized and individualistic. Americans also hold a host of contradictory views. We do not trust the government, but simultaneously we believe that government should solve pressing social problems. He concludes that “the American public does not hold much of a common public philosophy” although “some elements of it may be found” (82).

Adams then considers what, if any, common moral culture might exist. While he sees some areas of agreement (i.e., the importance of family life and religion), he, in general, sees little common moral culture. He concludes this assessment by stating that the “greatest challenge to today’s political leaders is to find a way to engage in public discourse” in a “culturally divided America.” In other words, the public challenge, according to Adams, will not be in locating the silent or moral majority, whose views are opposed by an elite. There is no silent majority to be found.

Part 2 outlines how Christians individually and Christian institutions might respond to the social realities of America. Herein he notes that many Christian thinkers from a variety of Christian traditions have argued that Christians need to confront the world. Adams notes that some Christians have emphasized culture while others have emphasized policy. Still others have been drawn to politics because of concern for the poor.

Once again, one can see the “introductory” character of Adams’s work. He does not cast judgment. He only cites different views and does not argue for the primacy of culture or policy. This would be useful to someone exposed to only one view of Christian engagement with the world. It is not sufficient to help someone to choose from among the existing views.

Adams also considers whether the Church—here understood as self-identified believers in Christianity—can have an impact on the culture. To do so, members of Christian denominations would have to have views greatly different from the common culture. Social science data show that members of religious organizations are more shaped by the culture than they are shapers of culture in most areas. One cannot rely on the church to change the culture if the culture is more dominant than the church.

The final chapter is perhaps the best. He considers what a “formative project” of public philosophy might look like. He states that “as new circumstances show, the formative project cannot be simply restorative in nature” (155). He says that such a public philosophy would “seek to lead Americans toward some common commitments ... and to a sense of public authority and responsibility that enables faithfulness to divine norms” (155). Like *After Virtue*, Alasdair McIntyre’s great work on moral philosophy, the hopefulness in Adams’ conclusion is found in the possibility of local communities. Here the reader is briefly introduced to the ideas of communitarianism.

The work succeeds in its aim, but it must be realized that its aim is to be a propaedeutic. The work includes noncontroversial theses (America is divided and Christians must confront the world), but Adams enables the reader to see that the resources are as great as the challenge.

—Michael Coulter  
*Grove City College*