

the Milky Way saying, "Hello, is anyone there", would have to wait a couple of million years for the message to be received, and then a couple of million years for a response of "Yes, we are here, how are you?" to make its way back. That does not present the prospect of an exciting conversation' (43).

One of the most intriguing parts of the book is section 8.2, entitled, 'God is an Alien'. Here the author discusses the various theories that have sought to interpret familiar biblical events as instances of extraterrestrial activity. In this section we learn about attempts that have been made to interpret the virgin birth as an instance of artificial insemination by an extraterrestrial being. Moreover, biblical accounts of angels in 'shining garments' are interpreted as aliens in spacesuits and Jesus' ability to walk on water can allegedly be explained by the effect of an antigravity beam. Most humorously, the resurrection was apparently achieved by the advanced medical science of an alien civilisation and Christ's ascension was interpreted as a sanctified version of 'Beam me up, Scotty!' (122). Although Wilkinson rejects such far-fetched theories, the very fact that they have been postulated demonstrates how reflection on extra-terrestrial life can stimulate the ingenuity and creativity of the human imagination. The book is also full of intriguing and humorous statistics, such as the observation that the gas cloud around a newly formed star, known as G34.3, which lies 10,000 light-years from earth, contains enough alcohol in it to make '300,000 pints of beer for every person alive on Earth every day for the next 1,000 million years!' (63).

The most obvious potential weakness of the book is the fact that it is based on the hypothesis that the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (SETI) will one day discover alien life forms. Given the nature of the subject, much of the book is devoted to speculative hypotheses, rather than observable phenomena. However, the speculations that Wilkinson makes are always well grounded and clearly extrapolated from the evidence that he skilfully sets out. Furthermore, it could also be argued that these exploratory conjectures have genuine theological value, even if SETI ultimately fails to achieve its objective, because even the speculative hypothesis that ETI *could* exist forces us to address familiar doctrines, such as creation and salvation, from a novel perspective.

Depending on one's perspective, another possible shortcoming is that the author seems to be more at home in the scientific material than in the philosophical or theological material. The book seems to be weighted quite heavily in favour of scientific analysis over theological reflection, as demonstrated, for instance, by the lack of sustained engagement with the thought of leading theologians who have reflected on the nature and significance of those doctrines that supervene on the questions that SETI is seeking to answer.

Nevertheless, this is still an exceptional book that explores with depth, clarity and erudition such complex issues as the divine imagination, the diversity and

unfathomable dimensions of God's good creation, the nature and purposes of God and the role of religious belief and scientific inquiry in the quest to discover what it means to be human. As such, it deserves to be read and discussed widely, not just by Star Trek fans and sci-fi geeks, nor even just by theologians and astronomers, but by anyone in search of fresh perspectives on some of the most decisive questions concerning the nature and destiny of the universe.

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Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power

Andy Crouch

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RÉSUMÉ

Andy Crouch examine la nature du pouvoir. Son but principal est de montrer que le pouvoir est un don appréciable pour l'épanouissement humain et le développement de la culture ; il s'oppose ainsi au courant de pensée qui prévaut dans les cercles sociologiques selon lesquels le pouvoir n'est qu'un facteur de corruption. Il analyse la culture populaire et critique les théories sociologiques de Friedrich Nietzsche et C. Wright Mills. Il montre en quoi le pouvoir est un bienfait, comment on en a abusé, quelle est la nature des institutions et quelles disciplines spirituelles conduisent à l'exercice approprié du pouvoir. Sa christologie est excellente, mais son ecclésiologie reste trop peu élaborée. C'est là une approche éclairée de la notion de pouvoir vue sous les angles de la sociologie, de la Bible et de la théologie.

SUMMARY

Andy Crouch explores what power is. His fundamental goal is to demonstrate that power is a good gift for human flourishing and the development of culture *contra* the prevailing sentiment in sociological circles that power only corrupts. Crouch analyses popular culture and critiques social theorists Friedrich Nietzsche and C. Wright Mills. He describes 1) how power is a gift, 2) how that gift has been misused, 3) the nature of institutions and 4) the spiritual disciplines that lead to the proper use of power. His Christology is excellent but his ecclesiology remains underdeveloped. This is a well-guided conversation into the sociological, biblical and theological concept of power.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Andy Crouch erforscht, worin Macht besteht. Sein grundlegendes Ziel ist zu belegen, dass Macht eine gute Gabe darstellt, die der Entfaltung des Menschen und der Entwicklung von Kulturen dient, gegenüber der in soziologischen Kreisen vorherrschenden Meinung, dass Macht nur korrumpiert. Crouch analysiert gängige Traditionen und kritisiert die Sozialtheoretiker Friedrich Nietzsche und

C. Wright Mills. Er erläutert, dass Macht eine Gabe ist, wie diese Gabe missbraucht worden ist, was das Wesen von Institutionen ist. Er erläutert auch die geistlichen Disziplinen, welche zu einem rechten Gebrauch von Macht führen. Seine Christologie ist ausgezeichnet, doch seine Ekklesiologie bleibt unterentwickelt. Das Buch ist eine wohl geführte Diskussion über soziologische, biblische und theologische Konzepte von Macht.

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Andy Crouch's book is an exploration on the nature of power. The fundamental goal of the project is to demonstrate that power is a good gift for human flourishing and the development of culture contra the prevailing sentiment in sociological circles that power only corrupts. As a journalist at Christianity Today, Crouch analyses popular culture, and critiques social theorists Friedrich Nietzsche and C. Wright Mills. In four basic movements, he describes 1) how power is a gift, 2) how that gift has been misused, 3) the nature of institutions and 4) the spiritual disciplines that lead to the proper use of power.

There are many facets of power. Fundamentally, the fact that we have power issues from God who creates in his own image. To bear his image is a calling to express power and dominion as vice regents and trustees of the earth. The gift of power is for humans to take the good creation and to cultivate it, thus making it very good. While grapes are good, wine is very good. When we as image bearers take up the responsibility to care and discipline our energies toward the common good, power can be a gift that brings life to all.

The reality, however, is that power corrupts. Injustice and idolatry stem from mishandling power. There is a great lure to play god in the lives of others that inevitably robs people of dignity and dehumanises what might be truly glorious. Here Crouch outlines the cynicism of Friedrich Nietzsche's idea that everybody seeks to extend their own will to power in space and time to the detriment or exclusion of others. In brutal competition and battle, this vision of power takes the good creation and drives it to dust, even to death. How might we engage with power as it should be? How can power be used in a way that gives life, in sustainable ways? First, Crouch locates our hope in the true image and icon of God, Jesus Christ, who did not grasp after power but in his death and resurrection enables humans to bear his image. Surprisingly, the answer also depends on institutions.

One of the great insights of the book is a call to engage institutions. Institutions are vehicles that give

context to the rules, artefacts and roles that individual autonomous agents play in culture. Thus, any desire to transmit faith or values to successive generations must in some way be institutionalised lest they vanish into history. Crouch is steeped in American religion and politics, and thus speaks to the ways in which virtually an entire generation has viewed any institution or corporation with deep suspicion. He sees that institutions are central to culture and actually form the primary ways in which culture is propagated. Thus, the true exercise of power is on the level of institution. Human actors, in fidelity to Jesus Christ, can seek to reform and even create new institutions that mend social ills. He recommends courageous steps toward institutional change that lasts beyond our lifetime.

The book is winsome and prophetic. Crouch's words are suggestive and invitational to take up spiritual disciplines that shape our identity and transfigure the way in which we use power. In a consumer-driven culture, Crouch issues an invitation to austerity through solitude, silence and fasting, in hope that the disciplines will connect us to the one who gifts us with power. It is at this point that I anticipated a more robust ecclesiology. To his credit, however, Crouch states clearly that the Church is the context in which we find true power in light of God's greater story of creation, fall, redemption and restoration. However, after nearly 300 pages, only one paragraph is devoted to understanding the sacraments as creative power. And while the book offers a brilliant study on the person of Christ as true image bearer, further exploration is needed with respect to ecclesiology and pneumatology. Crouch's call is a missiological one, and without further exploration of the work of the Spirit in the Church we remain hindered individuals. He is clear: Church matters; institutions matter; but what matters most is the individual. Paul's word to the church in Corinth brings light to the conversation: 'Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple, that God's spirit lives in you?' As image bearers, individuals matter, but for Paul the unity and holiness of the *ekklesia* was meant to be the dominant symbol of God's faithfulness and dominion over creation. In Scripture we have both the valuation of the individual and the primacy of the Church. It would be lovely to see Andy Crouch's next book tackle the institution of the Church in all its problems and potential glory.

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