

He Shines in All That's Fair, by Richard J. Mouw

reviewed by [David R. Stewart](#) in the [August 28, 2002](#) issue

These chapters are the written version of the author's Stob Lectures, given at Calvin Theological Seminary in 2000. The lectures retain distinct traces of the specific context in which they were delivered, but this actually works to the book's advantage, making even more vivid the spirited attempts of one Christian scholarly community to answer a perplexing question: "What can Christians assume they have in common with people who have not experienced the saving grace that draws sinners into a restored relationship with God?"

The opening chapter offers a concise and illuminating snapshot of how our culture approaches this topic: some groups still deny common grace's existence, some are drawn toward the notion, and some still find it offensive. Next Mouw (a philosopher who is president of Fuller Theological Seminary) fleshes out some of the ways common grace has been considered and contended over in recent years in his own Dutch Calvinist milieu.

Mouw explores some of the tough questions emerging from current theological discourse, such as, "Is the ultimate destiny of human beings the only thing God thinks about in assessing what we think, feel and do?" He reasons that since Genesis explicitly states that God took pleasure in, and was glorified by, the nonhuman dimensions of creation, it is quite plausible that God takes delight in certain human states of affairs, "even when they are displayed in the lives of neglect human beings." He notes that even historic Reformed confessional thought allows that it cannot be a matter of complete indifference to God whether the unregenerate do good or evil.

Mouw draws from a number of Reformed greats--Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Henry Van Til--to provide examples of how careful and faithful theologians have found it possible to do justice to both the decrees and the grace of God. (More recent reflections from Karl Barth, Thomas Jenkins and Alasdair MacIntyre are considered as

well.) Intriguingly, he uses the longstanding debate between supra- and infralapsarians to illustrate the distinctions between a view of God which focuses almost exclusively on the unfolding of his decrees, and an understanding which sees him as taking a keen and personal interest in the affairs of people. MacIntyre's contention that every moral philosophy presupposes a corresponding sociology is especially apropos in this regard.

Mouw sets out two biblical principles: that Christians must actively work for the well-being of larger societies, and that godly living should show forth attitudes and actions which will motivate us to promote societal health. In addressing the complex theological issue of common grace, the book raises excellent questions about such topics as the horizons of the mission of the church and the spiritual foundations for pastoral care and evangelism.

Among many other commendable qualities, *He Shines in All That's Fair* embodies a spirit which is consistent with the topic. Experience teaches us that it is possible for theologians to discuss a subject like grace in an entirely graceless manner. But Mouw exemplifies patient reflection on divergent views, and retains deep respect for the "strong opinions, held without apology," which have characterized thinking on common grace. In short space he treats a subject which is both timeless and timely with scholarly and historical incisiveness as well as Christian charity. His book is sure to enhance and enrich further discussions on this topic.