

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Less than Two Dollars a Day: A Christian View of World Poverty and the Free Market*, by Kent A. Van Til. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007.

xii+180 pp. pb. \$16.00. ISBN 978-0-8028-1767-9.

**Reviewed by Amos Yong**

There are two sides to the central argument of this revised PhD dissertation (written at Marquette University): that the meeting of basic human needs must be factored into any assessment of whether or not an economic system is just, and that contemporary mainstream economics – of the neoclassical rendition of Adam Smith’s free market capitalism – is incapable of meeting such needs because they do not show up on a register that is dominated by the categories of supply and demand, productivity and profit, and the dynamic transformation of capital into money and vice-versa. Van Til, visiting professor of religion at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, argues this twin-thesis through seven chapters.

After a first chapter providing basic definitions, Van Til presents an accessible introduction to the free market, focusing especially on its distributive mechanisms, its legal underpinnings (including the presumption and protection of property rights), and its psychological engine (especially “Rational Choice Theory” which is defined in terms of individual preferences and decisions linked to and fed by ever-increasingly efficient modes of desire satisfaction). Unlike pre-modern economic systems in which the well-being of tribes, communities, or the *polis* was central, the modern free market is focused on the individual. Now Van Til does not demonize the free market, noting it rewards productivity, satisfies individual preferences, offers a wider range of consumer choices, promotes or rewards creativity and innovation, develops investors and entrepreneurs, fosters efficiency while “punishing” sloth, and has enabled a wider distribution of goods than any other system known to humankind. Yet the market prods on despite a basic flaw of mainstream economics: that it does not on its own provide for the basic sustenance of the impoverished, the millions of people who live on less than two dollars a day, and, more importantly, that it is not designed to do so.

Chapter three expands on this central criticism of the reigning economic paradigm along six lines. First, extension of market does not necessarily increase the welfare of any, much less of those who are impoverished. Second, the idea that rational individuals will seek to satisfy their preferences provides no guarantees that what results will be for the common good. Third, mainstream market capitalist theory does not change initial endowments – such as those derived from biology, education, and the place and time of one’s birth – but rather accepts these as given. Fourth, economic good understood in terms of all desired trades being or having been made does not address basic sustenance issues since the starving millions simply do not register economically as they are not part of the flow of money to begin with! Fifth, the economic notion of *value* defined monetarily responds only to demand backed up by capacity to pay and also does

not address the issue of basic sustenance. Finally, because needs and preferences differ from individual to individual, there is no way to prioritize or make judgments about the needs and wants of the impoverished.

Given such a grim picture of market capitalism, however, Van Til's response is not to jettison the system but to expand its understanding to include, alongside commutative justice (involving the honoring of contracts, fair wages and prices, and the right to participate in the market and reap its benefits in accordance to what is invested, etc.) the notion of distributive justice focused on the meeting of basic human needs, especially for the poor. There are four steps to his constructive argument (corresponding to the last four chapters): biblical, theological, philosophical, and economic. Biblically, Van Til calls attention to the themes of Creation (especially of human beings as made in the image of God), Exodus, distribution of land, covenant law (including the prophetic denunciation for breaking God's call to justice, mercy, and righteousness), God's concern for the poor (including widows, orphans, and aliens), and the experience of the early church, concluding that: "the Bible establishes at least one norm about how the goods of this world should be distributed: that they be distributed in such a way that all humans have basic sustenance" (p. 84). The theological move observes these biblical themes as they have been developed by Roman Catholic social teachings, liberation theology, historical Calvinism, and the recent "Oxford Declaration on Christian Faith and Economics" (1990), concluding also that "all unite in the belief that meeting the basic needs of all people is a Christian mandate" (p. 102).

Philosophically, Van Til synthesizes the idea of Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper and contemporary political theorist Michael Walzer. The former helps us to recognize the integrity of the various spheres of human existence, including the economic dimension, as grounded on the authority of God as Creator, while the latter enables the articulation of a triadic set of criteria for just economics that is based on desert, equality, and *need*: "A state of just distribution will occur when all members of the human race have their basic needs met, when citizens receive equal treatment, and when producers receive rewards in proportion to their contribution" (p. 145). The final chapter suggests that the school of social economics, among other economic systems, is amenable to incorporation of such a distributive vision.

Arguably, *Less Than Two Dollars a Day* lives up to its stated goal of providing a template for alleviating world poverty using the present free market system by revising mainstream economic theory. Its strengths are various: an accessible writing style in which technical jargon – of which there is plenty in the fields of economics and theology, which the book engages – is kept to a minimum; a biblical vision focused on the mitigation of poverty; and a cross-disciplinary approach bringing economic theory and the biblical-theological traditions into dialogue toward a constructive proposal focused on an urgent global issue. Students at all levels will be able to engage this book, even while theologians will learn much about economics and economists will learn something about theology as well.

What about the blind-spots in Van Til's argument? Although I am not an economist, I cannot imagine that there are any substantial weaknesses in Van Til's analysis and critique of market capitalism, given that Prof. John Davis – a recognized and renowned historian and philosopher of economics who teaches in the Department of Economics both at Marquette and at the University of Amsterdam – was on his dissertation committee. I might gripe that on the theological side, there was a lack of interaction with critics of Kuyper's "spheres" distinction, and with alternative theological visions, whether that of the "two-kingdoms" approaches of Augustinianism and Lutheranism, the social gospel tradition of Rauschenbusch, or the revisionist Anglo-Catholicism of Radical Orthodoxy, among other options. Yet even to point this out is to focus on what Van Til never intended to accomplish, which in itself signals that he appears to have done well what he set out to do. In the end, perhaps the only remaining question is the proverbial million dollar one: is market capitalism, based as it is on individual desire, indeed capable of amelioration, or are proposals such as those outlined by Van Til hopelessly naïve in thinking that the driving force of the market, which many claim always devolves into a "gospel of greed," is finally incapable of being disciplined in a fallen and sinful world? One way to proceed in engaging this question is to read this book.

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*Revolution, Revival, and Religious Conflict in Sandinista Nicaragua,*  
by Calvin L. Smith. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2007. xvi+312pp.  
pb. €83, \$124.00. ISBN 978-9004-15645-6.

**Reviewed by Douglas Petersen**

The triumphant entry of El Comandante Daniel Ortega and his Sandinista insurgency forces into Managua, Nicaragua during the summer of 1979 marked the end of the Somoza tyrannical dynasty and the beginning of dramatic and far-reaching change where two grassroots religious movements, both appealing to the poor but radically different in approaches, would play central roles within a national social and political revolution.

Part history, part social and political science, and part theological, *Revolution, Revival, and Religious Conflict in Sandinista Nicaragua* provides a captivating account of lives lived during these impossible times. Drawing on numerous personal interviews and firsthand accounts, Calvin Smith examines the inner world of ordinary Nicaraguan Protestants as they struggled to make some sense of Sandinista political actions and policies amid a climate of suspicion, insecurity, and contradiction.

To their most admiring supporters, Ortega and the Sandinistas were liberating heroes determined to redress social inequality and oppression, problems long neglected by the Somoza regimes and the Catholic Church who seemed intent on acquiring wealth and power while systematically denying the masses their rightful share of either. Not only were the Sandinistas on the side of the people, but they also had the courage to stand up to the imperialistic United States.

To their detractors, the Sandinistas were godless power-grabbing communists who bullied any who dared to dissent, disrupted grassroots religious congregations, identified with the Marxist-Leninist governments of Cuba and Russia, and zealously spread a revolutionary message of rebellion to their Central American neighbors.

These opposing perceptions, for years, obscured the reality that a huge grassroots religious movement was emerging bringing with it the promise and power to change Latin America's political landscape. Now that the tension and rhetoric that thwarted dialogue for so many years has receded, it is possible to engage in reasoned and balanced evaluation.

This first full-length analysis of the role of Protestant religion during the Nicaraguan Revolution from 1979-1990 is a fascinating case study of a revolution that appeared on the surface to mold together the Marxism of the Sandinistas with the radical socialism of liberation theology and the spiritual fervor of evangelical/Protestantism. Smith contends that a more adequate understanding of the nuances of these movements, however, could provide an interpretive lens that may shed light on the inherent nature of the revolution and the possible impact of evangelical religion upon the future of Latin American politics in general.

The revolutionary perspective of the Sandinistas and the political worldview of Nicaraguan Protestants are hard to comprehend, especially for the West. Smith opens the door a crack to give the reader some insight into the world as the Sandinistas and Protestants saw it; sometimes guided by ideology or theology, other times by cynicism, and often by pragmatism.

By interpreting most events through the grid of militant nationalism and a new Marxism, the Sandinistas determined their friends and their enemies by adopting a "for us or against us" attitude. Revolutionary political leaders expected and generated opposition. Using absolute power, they policed with a heavy hand, clamping down on opponents and closing up political spaces. The Sandinistas could be arrogant, repressive, and intolerant.

At the same time, the usual monolithic front of Roman Catholicism was splintering from within. Traditional Catholicism represented by Nicaragua's Archbishop, Miguel Obando y Bravo, a vocal opponent of the Sandinista government, sided with Reagan's Washington, claiming that the new revolutionary government was merely an expression of "godless communism." In contrast, Jesuit priests working in Nicaragua, committed to a theological stance that was politically proactive, challenged Catholicism's historical allegiance to the elites, contending that the Church, as it had done throughout Latin America, ignored the unjust social structures that perpetuated the marginalization of

millions of Nicaraguans to a life of poverty and oppression. Rather than being held hostage by the ruling classes, the priests clamored for the Church to align with revolutionary elements willing to side with the poor and confront the injustices inherent in existing social systems. Since the Nicaraguan Archbishop and Rome viewed the activities of the Jesuit priests and the 'popular church' (Catholics who supported liberation theology) as a threat to church authority and church unity, internal conflict between traditional Catholicism and the radical socialism espoused by the Jesuit priests was inevitable.

Similar divisions quickly surfaced within Nicaraguan Protestant Christianity as well. Relationships had soured between a minority group of historic Protestants who seemed to support all things Sandinista, and the majority comprised mostly of grassroots Pentecostal groups often openly opposed to the Sandinistas. According to Smith, the minority coalition represented by a national non-governmental organization, *El Consejo Evangélico Pro-Ayuda al Desarrollo* (CEPAD), accepted, almost wholesale, the actions of the new regime. Because the Sandinistas had fallen out with traditional Catholicism, CEPAD leadership recognized the opportunity to be treated on par with their traditional rivals, and quickly stepped in the vacuum acquiring "a privileged political role and the ear of government." In order to preserve its privileged position as a power broker with the Sandinistas, Smith argues, CEPAD endeavored to project an impression before the military junta that they spoke on behalf of all Protestants.

In contrast to what appeared to be the leftist leanings of CEPAD, the majority of Protestants, mainly Pentecostal, represented by a consortium of evangelical pastors, *El Consejo Nacional de Pastores Evangélicos de Nicaragua* (CNPEN), were either 'uninterested [in] or hostile' towards the Sandinistas, interpreting their rhetoric, foreign links, educational systems, and press censorship as "Marxists and communists." For the average Nicaraguan evangelical struggling for survival and inclined to believe that politics was dirty business anyways, the political revolution of the Sandinistas did not seem much different to them from the oppressive hand of the Somoza regime.

Besides their mistrust and suspicion of almost any political entity, for the most part, grassroots evangelical/Pentecostals also were theologically and politically opposed to the rhetoric emanating from CEPAD. Further, the CNPEN leadership, representing a group many times larger than their more liberal Protestant cousins, resented that CEPAD, from a lofty perch as government favorites, had the brass to speak on behalf of all Protestants. An exploration of the nature and dynamics of relations between these two blocs of Protestantism, and in turn between the Protestant blocs and the Sandinistas, is really the story in Smith's book.

Clearly, the differences in ideology between historic Protestants and grassroots Pentecostals were real and profound. It would also seem apparent that there emerged a power clash between the 'old guard' representing CEPAD and the emerging leaders of the grassroots. Young leaders, who represented huge masses of Pentecostals, were not content to have others, not even other

Protestants, set the political agenda, define the rules, or speak out on their behalf. They were willing and capable to speak for themselves. Indeed, their adherents were no longer the baker's dozen. Though marginalized by deeply entrenched social and political structures, by sheer dint of persistence, they insisted to their Protestant colleagues as well as to the Sandinista government that they had come of age. They demanded recognition as the legitimate leaders of multitudes, and insisted on being treated on their own terms with full voice at the political table.

Significantly, while the members of the military junta were doctrinaire, they were neither atheists nor godless. Especially in the early years of the revolution, the Sandinistas were suspicious that at least some of the Pentecostal groups were pawns of the *gringos* and therefore presented a security risk. However, there were also numerous occasions when Daniel Ortega, and even the hard-line Minister of the Interior, Tomás Borge, made unilateral decisions in favor of these humble churches. While CEPAD may have enjoyed superior access to official corridors of power, clearly the Sandinistas permitted Pentecostal grassroots groups enough social space for them to double and triple in size.

Calvin Smith cuts new ground describing the inner relationships between the evangelical blocs and the perceptions held by Protestants of the Sandinistas. The wealth of the primary sources, and the insightful post-revolution analysis of the 1979-1990 Sandinista government, makes this book an important addition to the burgeoning body of literature that is exploring the involvement and influence of Latin American evangelicals/Pentecostals in the political arena.

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*What About Hitler? Wrestling with Jesus's Call to Nonviolence in an Evil World*, by Robert W. Brimlow. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006. ix+192pp. pb. \$19.99. ISBN 978-1-58743-065-7.

**Reviewed by Stephen Vantassel**

Brimlow contends that "Just War" theory does not provide a satisfactory Christian alternative to pacifism. He substantiates this claim on two main arguments. First, he explains that "Just War" theory is unworkable because it cannot help us determine whether or not a specific hostile event is justified. Therefore, by extrapolation, if Just War theory fails to adequately guide the moral use of force then neither can it be used by Christians to defend the morality of war. Second, Brimlow believes that Christ's teaching, as found in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), requires Christians to practice non-violence. Brimlow understands that his non-violence position is considered by Just War theorists as impractical and idealistic. But he is not dissuaded. He argues that for Christians,

the critical issue is not the practicality of a lifestyle of non-violence; it is whether we are willing to obey Christ's commands.

Thus far, Brimlow's position follows standard pacifistic reasoning. What makes this text interesting, however, is the way Brimlow's discussion of the emotional side of following a non-violent lifestyle. Rather than defending non-violence with abstract concepts, Brimlow explores the difficult ethical choices confronting pacifists by relating his own struggles and ultimately by addressing the ultimate challenge to pacifism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely Hitler himself. Brimlow reveals his own struggles through a series of self-revelations. He is so transparent about his thoughts that readers will think they are reading his devotional diary. In order to discuss the morality of pacifism during the time of Hitler, Brimlow explores the actions of Bonhoeffer, who ultimately rescinded his pacifism by plotting against Hitler. Brimlow, in a sensitive critique, says that Bonhoeffer was wrong to participate in the plot to assassinate Hitler. Brimlow also says that the question of "What about Hitler?" is somewhat misguided because Hitler did not arise *sui generis*. Christians must remember that their failure to exemplify the love of Christ laid the social and moral stage that made the performance by Hitler possible. Whether readers agree or not with the author's conclusions, they will be as touched by his forthrightness and call to discipleship as I was.

Unfortunately, the book has several weaknesses. First, Brimlow's use of Scripture was profoundly selective and in some sense naïve. He neglected to seriously consider the likelihood that the Sermon on the Mount only applies to interpersonal ethics and not to corporate or international ethics. If his devotional sections are any indication, Brimlow should not have stopped his interpretative work after the initial reading. He should have continued to interpret the passage in light of the entire canon. I commend Brimlow's commitment to vibrantly and devotionally reading of Scripture. But I would exhort him to remember that God wants us to understand His Word in the entire context of revelation.

Second, Brimlow forgets that pointing out the inadequacies of Just War theory does not prove that there are no legitimate justifications for war. His failure to demonstrate that the Bible forbids all Christian participation with war suggests, to me, that a justification for some war is at least theoretically possible. Third, Brimlow neglected to consider that perhaps Just War theory provides a useful, but imperfect, moral exercise to help government leader to stop and reflect about whether their reasoning for war is appropriate. I suspect that, at least for Western leaders, Just War theory has delayed the initiation of wars and probably prevented others entirely.

Despite these weaknesses, the clarity and simplicity of Brimlow's writing combine to make this book an excellent addition to the required readings of a political ethics course. The author's honesty and passion to follow Christ will engage students at both an intellectual and emotional level; a combination that should encourage lively and thoughtful class discussion on this important and controversial topic.

*Prophetic Realism: Beyond Militarism and Pacifism in an Age of Terror*,  
by Ronald H. Stone. New York: T & T Clark, 2005.  
vii+192pp. pb. \$19.99. ISBN 978-0567026415

**Reviewed by Stephen Vantassel**

Christian political theorists have struggled how to develop a coherent theory of foreign policy that is both faithful to Christian morality and cognizant of the complexities of international diplomacy. Typically, foreign policy theories fall into two camps: Idealism or Realism. Idealist foreign policy says that one must work to establish a world order according to a grand design, such as Christian morality. Idealists typically favor pacifism and reject any political position deemed to violate the governing moral code of the overarching foreign policy plan. Realist foreign policy, on the other hand, adopts a more modest goal. Realists believe that the Idealistic goal of establishing “a new world order” is impractical and moralistic. Realist foreign policy practitioners seek to maintain international stability, asserting that the teachings of Jesus are for private and personal morality and do not apply to the international arena.

Drawing upon the teachings of Augustine, Calvin, Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, and Hans Morgenthau, Stone argues for a third option called “Prophetic Realism.” Prophetic Realism seeks to balance Biblical teaching on justice, while avoiding the excessive idealism of pacifism. At its root, Prophetic Realism understands that foreign relations require compromise. But Stone does not believe that such compromises need be governed simply by expediency. He argues that a proper foreign policy can be established, not perfectly but progressively, by moral principles brought to bear to concrete situations. Prophetic Realism is modest in that it recognizes that wars will happen and that diplomatic decisions and policies often have unforeseen consequences. Nevertheless, Prophetic Realism’s tie with moral principles provides a boundary that restrains both political cynicism and the evil quest for empire.

Although sympathetic to a Prophetic Realism perspective, Stone’s discussion presented several difficulties. First, his argument for Prophetic Realism was frequently interrupted by discussions concerning its historical development. Readers not well versed in the political teachings of Niebuhr, Tillich, and Morgenthau may find these asides bewildering and distracting. Stone would have served readers better by providing a detailed exposition of his view and leave the historical discussion for another publication.

Second, leaving aside his regrettable acceptance of higher-criticism and liberal interpretation, I question the reasoning for Stone’s attention to Amos and inattention to David for finding a basis for Christian political theory. Stated simply, “Why would the teaching of Amos, during Israel’s political decline, be more important for informing political theory than what could be gleaned from Israel’s Golden Age?” Third, Stone presented a truncated view of the Church’s role in international relations. He was absolutely correct in saying that the Church should oppose injustice in all its forms, but his neglect to explain the role

evangelism should play in the Church's international work was surprising. Certainly, all Christians agree that external issues, such as poverty and political oppression, lead to wars. However, the Gospel, by changing individual behavior from the inside, provides a powerful, and peaceful way, to fight injustice too. During a trip to Costa Rica in 1987, a Catholic priest, who was sympathetic to Liberation Theology's critique of U.S. foreign/economic policy, told me that converts to Protestantism tended to improve their economic status. I asked why. He said because they stopped smoking, drinking, and became hard workers. It never occurred to the priest that perhaps the Gospel changed these converts so that they were now able to adapt and prosper despite alleged challenge of economic injustice. Stone's over attention to the institutions of power, to the neglect of individual choice, detracts from his Prophetic Realist views. He could have improved his position both biblically and practically by saying that Christians should limit the scope of government power in order to make space for the Church's mission to evangelize the world.

Nevertheless, the book does have some high points. I particularly appreciated Stone's discussion of power and peacemaking in chapters 6 and 7. He quite properly showed that nations must consider economic stability along with national security. However, these goals should not detract from the responsibility to wage peace. Stone is right to call Christians to press their governments to work for balance in those areas. Additionally, those familiar with the political writings of Niebuhr, Tillich and Morgenthau should find Stone's frequent references to them enlightening. But readers will have to look elsewhere to find a more detailed discussion of how to implement prophetic realism in the contemporary world.

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*Grace and Global Justice: The Socio-Political Mission of the Church in an Age of Globalization*, by Richard Gibb. Bletchley: Paternoster, 2006.

208pp. pb. £19.99, \$29.00. ISBN 978-1-84227-459-0

**Reviewed by Jon DePriest**

The blurring of boundaries between nations and the global community has prompted increased discussions concerning the place of the church in a changed world. Beginning with the Peace of Westphalia, nation-states had been the hallmarks of socio-political boundaries, but recent economic and political confluences have many thoughtful evangelicals examining the role the church has to play in a more global world. With his background in international business,

Richard Gibb's *Grace and Global Justice* chooses an overtly scholarly approach in an attempt to grapple with the issue.

*Grace and Global Justice* is arranged in three parts and focuses on two questions. The two questions are: 1) What does it mean for the Christian community to conceive itself as a community of grace? and 2) What are the implications of the church's distinctiveness for its socio-political mission in an age of globalization? In answering these questions, Gibb gathers a wealth of scholarship related to both and indirectly, but eventually, brings the reader to an understanding of his point. This is a longer than expected process for a monograph, but makes great sense once one understands that the work is framed in a formulaic rendition of a dissertation from the University of St. Andrews (or from the series of Paternoster Theological Monographs—I could not tell which). Consequently, the book creates the landscape of an introductory course on the role of a grace-oriented Christian community in a quest to answer the lack of justice that abounds in a global, secular world.

Part One: *The Methodology and Foundations* has two chapters—the first one lays out the project and gives a literature review of relevant scholarship already in the field. As with many dissertation layouts, this section came off as a standard model for the degree instead of a context for the study (like a brief introduction). The second chapter contains one of the better sections of Gibb's work because it has more of Gibb in it. Here he creates a stepping stone approach to a grace and covenantal community which takes the gift of relational communion from the purely vertical and extends it to all humanity. In what seems to echo Gregory Boyd's book on *The Myth of a Christian Nation*, Gibb notes that the true calling of grace resounds in service.

Part Two: *The Comparison* (chapters 3-5) compiles grace as a relational concept of morality and the mission of the church in the writings of Jurgen Moltmann, Stanley Hauerwas, and Oliver O'Donovan. While this section contains an excellent distillation of these three authors' writings, more than anything else, it merely returns to the level of literature review. Gibb takes each of these three authors and unveils the relevant aspects of their work in relation to grace and globalization. At the end of each chapter, he adds a critical reflection component, which I expected to contain his take on the writings. As a critique, however, this section continued a strictly scholarship approach of located strengths and weaknesses from the insights of other quoted sources. Because it is over 80 pages of the book, I found this more than too much off track. While reading this section, one wonders where it is going and how it connects to an argument that just got going in chapter two. When one reaches chapter seven, it becomes clear that Gibb sets these authors up to glean informative points that will be used in the final chapter. Unfortunately, it does not suffice to recover the time taken to read this long, though informative section.

Part Three: *The Test Case* contains three chapters: *Power and the Dynamics of Global Transformations*, *Grace and Agents of Justice in a Global World*, and a two-page conclusion that summarizes Gibb's final points. Chapter Six on global transformations is clearly the most original section of this book for international

scholarship. His work with Ernst and Young as a businessman informs this section with insights sorely lacking in most of the book. Still, Gibb starts the section using Held's three categories of globalization schools before commencing on his original contributions. It needs to be noted that his work on the institutional economic developments from Bretton Woods and later developments like the WTO add significant elements into globalization understanding. Gibb then covers both the contributed good and adverse effects of these changes in a chapter that ends too abruptly. Returning to the theological, chapter seven completes the project. The long string of analyzed authors returns as Stiglitz, Rawls, and others are treated. After returning to the three authors in the middle, Gibb concludes that:

*Borders have always been of secondary importance for the community of grace. A theocentric vision of God's eschatological kingdom rule... causes the church in being a sign of this future hope to have an unambiguously universal and holistic vision of global justice. (202)*

For Gibb, it is this transcendent aspect of the church that needs to influence a world in poverty and plagued by abuse of power.

Certainly, *Grace and Global Justice* will appeal to those whose interest in the global reach of an intentional international church is keen. Gibb's contributions to the discussion, though few, are excellent. His work with international business lends a viewpoint that should be developed more and contributed in future works. Much of that viewpoint in this book is obfuscated by the overwhelming presence of research and argumentative analysis rather than contribution. It appears to me that more of Gibb would be a favored read. In the world of scholarship, where "lumpers" and "splitters" compete for publication, there are too few lumpers trying to correlate scholarship for interested readers. Gibb is one of them.

One other issue must be addressed in this review—the approach to style. The excessive use of the words "we" and "our" as if I were part of the research team detracted from the prose. I often felt like I was on a walk through the scholarly material of grace and globalization like a dog unwittingly is forced to follow the wishes of the master. The final point of style that weakened the work was the unwillingness to present a thesis up front. The reader is given outstanding prompts as to outline and the direction of the organization, but is left to wait for the "conclusion" that comes at the end of sections and chapters to get to an argument. It would benefit the reader to know the argument so that the material about to be covered has a reference point.

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*Israel, God's Servant*, by David W. Torrance and George Taylor. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007. 224pp. pb. £9.99. ISBN 978-1-84227-554-2.

**Reviewed by Calvin L. Smith**

This book offers a theological response to the modern state of Israel, an increasingly important issue within Christianity today. The authors' view is unequivocal: "God continues to use the Jewish people and the tiny State of Israel, as his servant to witness to himself before the nations" (3). But far from taking an "Israel right or wrong" stance so prevalent among popular Christian Zionist authors, this book offers a theologically-coherent, thoughtful, sensitive and challenging approach to the topic. As such, it deserves serious consideration, not least because in recent years the field has been dominated by supersessionist studies

As its title indicates, the book argues the Jews and Israel are, corporately, God's servant (Is 41:8, 44:1, 45:4). Such a calling entails being the "bearer of God's revelation to the world" (Lk 2:32, Jn 4:22), "a light in darkness mediating the revelation and saving grace of God to the nations" (55). Moreover, "[God] needed one people to represent all peoples, so that their sin could represent all sin" (124). How, then, could Israel possibly be discarded by God to be superseded by the Church? Over twelve chapters David Torrance and George Taylor (a pseudonym) explore the current Middle East crisis, the land from a theological perspective, the Church's history of anti-Semitism, Islam and its worldview, eschatology, and key biblical passages relating to the theme of Israel. There are also seven useful appendices, including several revealing primary sources from Hamas and PLO rarely discussed by a Western liberal media yet which shed important light on the current conflict.

For the authors, the current Middle East crisis is an "immense spiritual struggle" for which there is no political solution. Islam, a "sleeping giant" before 1948, sees Israel's existence as an affront to the very heart of its faith which must be destroyed if Islam's honour is to be restored. This crisis has dominated the political stage for the past sixty years, further proof of the spiritual nature of the conflict, a battle between Christ and all the evil powers of this world. Torrance and Taylor see the Jews as a witness to the world, which they argue is the real reason behind longstanding anti-Semitism. Despite claims to the contrary, the Jews are not hated for killing Christ, which the authors maintain was actually God's foreordained plan (ironically, they argue, liberal Protestantism's denial of Christ's atoning death removes the "theological backbone to resist a resurgence of anti-Semitism", 80). Neither is anti-Semitism rooted, as some Jewish voices claim, in an anti-Semitic New Testament, which this book not only refutes but also demonstrate its strongly pro-Jewish nature. Such claims are merely historical attempts to justify anti-Semitism, which existed long before the New Testament (consider, for example, the story of Esther). Rather, Torrance and Taylor contend, the destructive anger of anti-Semitism...

*Can be located in a number of core resentments; a resentment of the Jews as proof of the existence of God; a resentment of the way in which they depict our sinful nature; a resentment of the way the Jews testify to our dependence on God's grace; and a resentment of the way in which God has prospered and privileged the Jews at certain times. (69).*

Thus the enemies of God hate Israel because they bear witness of him (Ps 83:2-4). It is not insignificant, Torrance and Taylor point out, how the twentieth century's two most anti-Christian ideologies – Fascism and Communism – targeted the Jews. To these we might add a third, Islamism, which seeks Israel's annihilation.

*Israel, God's Servant* also deals at length with the biblical theology theme of the land, challenging the view that these Old Testament promises are spiritualised in the New in favour of a worldwide kingdom of God. When the disciples asked the resurrected Jesus if he was about to restore the kingdom to Israel (Ac 1:6), he did not say this was an invalid question. Rather, his response suggests quite the opposite. That is not to say the authors totally reject a spiritualised promise, yet for them the land remains an important theological issue as they differentiate between an "inner covenant with Israel and the land and the wider covenant with all humankind and all creation in the ongoing redeeming purposes of God" (59). Yet unlike Christian Zionism, whose uncompromising stance on the land and its borders at times echoes the most trenchant Likud policy of a Greater Israel, Torrance and Taylor suggest God is not overly concerned about exact borders, even suggesting the 1947 UN partition plan gave Israel too much land for its population size (11). Yet neither could a Jewish state exist away from its ancestral homeland, for example in Uganda or Argentina as originally posited. God's covenant with Israel is intimately associated with the Holy Land. Their discussion of eschatology, which warns against sensationalism and eschews both narrow dispensationalism and postmillennialism, similarly defies Christian Zionist stereotypes and parodies. Their main thrust is that Judaeo-Christian teaching has always emphasised how history is heading towards a culmination of God's plan, in which Israel plays a central role.

Arguably, Torrance's and Taylor's view of the land is overplayed somewhat when they state Israel's removal from the land "destroys, or very largely destroys, her national identity and threatens her very life and existence" (55). After all, despite two thousand years of wandering the Jews have retained a strong sense of identity, though memories of their ancestral homeland undoubtedly played an important part in the process. Moreover, the authors' controversial claim that most anti-Zionism is anti-Semitic will undoubtedly enrage those supercessionists who are particularly critical of Israel. That is not to say Israeli politics cannot be criticised, but the authors contend it is quite another thing to criticise Zionism as an ideology. Interestingly, though, they cite Martin Luther King, who echoed the view that anti-Zionism is anti-Semitic. The authors also condemn the Church's

long history of anti-Semitism, which has made it so much more difficult for Jews to come to Christ today.

*Israel, God's Servant* offers an overall treatment of the subject rather than focusing on a particular aspect of it. Some may regard this as a shortfall at the expense of depth, and indeed the book, which originally derived out of various conference addresses, is not always academic in its presentation. For example some useful facts and statements are not always sourced, while the political analysis is brief, though useful. Nonetheless this broad approach, together with an eminently readable style in fact represents the book's strength, providing an accessible theological introduction which is far removed from some of the more simplistic and somewhat naïve pro-Israel popular efforts. Moreover, Torrance and Taylor avoid pejorative language and display genuine sensitivity towards both Jew and Palestinian, which some authors on both sides of the debate do well to note. The authors maintain God loves Jews and Arabs equally, as well as recognising very real problems on the ground that have caught up innocent Palestinians in violence not of their making, whether by Israel or surrounding Arab countries who have exploited the plight of Palestinians for their own purposes. Neither does this book exhibit blind support for Israel, stating her people do not currently rely on God, to whom they need to turn back. Such a sensitive approach is likely born out of a pastoral approach to the crisis (Torrance is a retired Church of Scotland minister), as well as the authors' view that only a spiritual solution will solve the current crisis. The book represents a useful biblical theology contribution which helps to bring balance to a debate which all too often is acrimonious and polarised. It will benefit both lay reader and theological student alike and as such is a valuable contribution to this debate.

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*God's Judgments: Interpreting History and the Christian Faith,*  
by Steven J. Keillor. Downers Grove, ILL: IVP, 2007. 223pp.  
pb. \$18.00. ISBN 978-0-8308-2565-3.

**Reviewed by Mark S. Sweetnam**

The terrorist attacks upon the heart of American society on September 11, 2001 had a profound effect on the opening years of the twenty-first century, and few in the western world who lived through 9/11 can fail to remember where they were when the news broke. This reviewer spent September 11 at a conference, in company with some 300 other evangelical Christians. At the request of an elderly missionary, the company stood to sing Kittie L. Suffield's hymn, 'God is still on the throne'. With enough hymnsheets for only a fraction of the audience, the

unfamiliar words of the verses were rendered falteringly; this served only to heighten the contrast with the lusty expression of the chorus, with its affirmation of God's sovereignty and control of His universe. It was only later, on emerging from the seclusion of the conference to a world in turmoil, that we learned that we were singing the hymn as the first plane crashed into the World Trade Center. The confluence of events was striking, and in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Christian confidence in God's control of His universe was an enviable possession. But such an assurance did not answer all the questions; and the time lapse was short before the search for a cause began. Secular pundits were quick to offer their suggestions: hasty evangelical responses were offered, and just as hastily withdrawn by Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. This important book by Steven Keillor represents an altogether more reasoned attempt to answer the question 'what was God doing on September 11?'

Keillor's engagement with this important question is in disagreement with two strands of Christian thinking on the question. He deplores Falwell and Robertson's hasty and partisan response, but takes greater exception to the response of 'worldview' evangelicals who, he charges, are agnostic on judgment, unwilling to commit themselves on whether 9/11 was an instance of Divine judgment, never mind more detailed questions of what was judged, and why. Keillor's position is that God does act in judgement on nations in the present, that 9/11 represented just such a judgement, and that it is possible to identify features of American society that called for Divine judgement. His case is, in the first instance, inferred from Scripture, but he bolsters it by considering previous events in American history that can, in his contention, clearly be understood as acts of Divine judgement.

The book opens with an introduction that, in addition to outlining the argument to follow establishes two fundamental bases for Keillor's case. Firstly, Keillor stresses that he approaches his subject as an historian; not a theologian, and not a philosopher. This, he suggests, is no disadvantage, for Christianity 'is an interpretation of history ... far more than it is a worldview or philosophy.' (15) The second issue addressed in this introduction is the definition of judgement. Keillor is keen to move away from the concept of judgement as only a 'final curtain-dropping event.' Rather, the book 'focuses intently on the meaning of the Hebrew word *mishpat* – especially the one meaning of a 'sifting out. ... Thus, judgment is ... also a lengthy process with God as an active investigator testing people's hearts, giving the wicked a chance to repent and the righteous to fall away.' (17) To preserve this emphasis, *mishpat* is used throughout the book in preference to judgement.

With these basic methodological premises established, Keillor's first chapter asks the question 'If September 11 was a message, then what did it mean?' It comprises a sampling of responses to 9/11 – from 'mass-circulation magazines', from 'leftist, centrist, and right-wing journals', and in 'religious (Christian) books and journals.' (20, 23, 29) This survey establishes, in the secular media, a lack of agreement on the significance of September 11, and a tendency to highlight

ideological foes as the causes of the tragedy. Keillor's survey of Christian journals and books traces a similar pattern across the political spectrum, stressing that 'religious thinking was not isolated from the political thinking.' (29) This lack of coherence, and ideological bias established, Keillor moves closer to his central argument in his second chapter 'Why September 11 couldn't be God's judgment (or could it)?' This traces, across the conservative, centrist, and leftist spectrum, a range of responses denying the possibility that 9/11 could represent Divine judgement, and a smaller sampling that refused entirely to eliminate this possibility. The context of this chapter is secular thinking, but Keillor traces, and deplores a similar lack of clarity about Divine judgement in his third chapter 'Why is worldview thinking agnostic on God's judgments in history?' This chapter, one of the densest in a closely argued book, sees Keillor interact critically with the worldview thinking that has become so pervasive within evangelicalism. This chapter picks up on the content of the introduction, in its discussion of the respective values of history and philosophy. The chapter contends that worldview thinking is a legacy of the Enlightenment, that it is not without its utility, but that it fails crucially in its depiction of Christianity as the product of syllogistic reasoning, rather than the result of a testimony to be believed. Finally, the chapter offers a tentative interpretation of September 11. Keillor frankly acknowledges the difficulty of uncovering the precise details of American society that were judged on 9/11; the temptation, to which Falwell and Robertson succumbed, 'to blame judgment on sins that concerned them the most.' (57) A safer alternative is to look at the grievances identified by the sort of Islamic radicals who carried out the 9/11 attacks, and to see if any of these might also be offensive to God.

This crucial point reached, Keillor goes back to Scripture, devoting a chapter apiece to God's judgement in the Old and New Testaments. A third chapter identifies Christ, the Son of Man, in his descent, death, ascension, and return as history's meaning. The next four chapters put the book's central argument in longer historical perspective: the burning of Washington in 1814, and the Civil War are interrogated as examples of God at work in national judgement. The following two chapters project the argument into the future, as Keillor identifies the debate over human genetic engineering (HGE) as a discussion where a Biblical view of God's judgement is crucial. The worldview approach, he contends, results in the repeated 'thinning' of Christian involvement in the debate: a robust assertion of the judgement prerogative of the Son of Man is vital to Christian participation this debate. A final chapter discusses the relevance of Keillor's thesis to American democratic politics, with particular emphasis of God's use of the two political parties to execute His judgement on each other.

This is a provocative and stimulating book. More than that, it is a book that glorifies God, by reasserting his sovereign rights over his creation, and by stressing the uniqueness of Christ, as Son of Man, in relation to human history. Keillor has engaged with his subject with depth and care: the footnotes track an extensive engagement with some of the most influential voices in contemporary society. His argument is not an unproblematic one, and it leaves a good many

questions still to be addressed. But this volume is an important one for any one who believes that ‘God is still on the throne.’

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*The War on Terror: How Should Christians Respond?*

by Nick Solly Megoran. Nottingham, UK: IVP, 2007.

158pp. pb. £7.99. ISBN 978-1-84474-175-5.

**Reviewed by Bethan Pearse**

In *The War on Terror*, Megoran aims to equip the average Christian with a biblically based perspective on war and terrorism. In many ways this book achieves this aim. It is clear, accessible and very biblically centred. Megoran is not attempting to break new ground here, but to express his pacifist persuasion as the most plausible reading of the Biblical texts.

The book begins well setting out the subject matter in an appealing and interesting way. There is a good basic outlining of the positions of both George Bush and Osama bin Laden. Megoran introduces three Christian approaches to war: ‘holy war’, ‘just war’ and ‘pacifism’, and positions himself as inclined to the pacifist perspective. It is a shame that these contrasting views are not used more fully throughout to compare and discuss the points he raises.

From this beginning the book does not quite live up to expectations. Each subsequent chapter is begun with a Bible reading, clearly taken directly from the sermon format in which the material was originally presented. Whilst this is useful in ensuring the Bible plays a central role, in terms of providing clearly set out answers to common questions it doesn’t work quite so well. It does lead Megoran to deal with some of the ‘trickier’ Bible passages on war however, and it is good to see that the Old Testament approaches to war and terror are considered to some extent.

Megoran’s first chapter of biblical exegesis considers Jesus’ message to ‘love your enemy’. Megoran proposes that Jesus in fact meant what he said. It is an excellent point, however there is little expansion of this idea. There is some mention of Miroslav Volf and Jürgen Moltmann but no real engagement with them, or any other scholars. Perhaps that is expecting too much given the intentions of the author.

Similarly Megoran’s consideration of Jeremiah is a little patchy. He focuses on mercy whilst passing over a key problem issue in the text regarding the judgement of God and war as part of that judgement. The overall impression, in this and later chapters, is that the biblical exegesis is a little lighter on theology than it should be. The ideas are simply presented which is good, but there seems to be insufficient depth even so. Again this seems to be due to a lack of

development from the sermon to the book format. Those areas written specifically for the book (the introductory chapters and closing chapters) really stand out in comparison.

Thankfully, Megoran improves in the second half of the book as he begins to form conclusions on positive action and touches on less commonly covered subjects such as Christian nationalism. Being a political geographer by profession it seems that he begins to get more comfortable the more he touches on and refers to his own specialism.

This fact really comes to the fore in the study guides at the back of the book entitled 'digging deeper'. These guides provide really excellent introductions to several of the key issues. Megoran explains various perspectives on terrorism and provides a more detailed explanation of the three classic Christian understandings of war. He also deftly summarises the important conversations surrounding the war on terror from scholars such as Jean Bethke Elshtain. More of this type of material in the main body of the book would have added significantly to the points being made.

This latter section touches on the kind of information really needed in the Church to enable bible study groups to read the texts more critically and with topical engagement. The fairly standard answers in the main body of the book are, for the most part, very familiar readings of the Bible but without the additional subject knowledge that Megoran includes in the study guides. The integration of the two elements is exactly the type of interdisciplinary work that the Church needs, but here it is only partially done.

It is a shame that much of the real substance of the subject is left until the end and not included as supporting evidence, or used as conversational partners, throughout the book. However there is little to disagree with in Megoran's understanding of a biblical response to warfare.

Perhaps those who have not considered the subject of terrorism, or more generally warfare, from a Christian perspective will find this book useful. Its origins as a series of sermons account for the content a great deal. As sermons it seems they would have been competent, interesting and addressing topical issues. In book format there is something lacking, but it still has much to offer. The questions and study section may well provoke further discussion. At the very least Megoran's aim to spur Churches into thinking biblically about current political issues can only be a positive thing.

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