

Book Reviews

Politics according to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture, by Wayne Grudem, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 2010, pages 619, with indices. ISBN: 0310330297.

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Wayne Grudem is perhaps best known for his well-received systematic theology and his work in support of a complementarian understanding of male-female relationships. But with this text, Grudem puts his considerable exegetical and theological ability to service in the muddy world of American politics.

Grudem organizes the book into three main sections. Part 1, Basic Principles, reveals the hermeneutical and theoretical basis behind Grudem's conservative understanding of Biblical political theory. Grudem forcefully, but without rancor, contends that Scripture repeatedly warns on the one hand, against expansive government power trumpeted by Democrats and Sojourners, and on the other, against excessive restriction of government as proffered by Libertarians. Grudem argues Christians should be engaged in politics but not consumed by it. Christians should not ignore the political world as some believers will be called to serve in this capacity. Grudem cautions readers to be clear-eyed about the limits of politics. Political victories, though important, will not bring salvation. In an oft repeated phrase, Grudem says the role of government is to punish evil. Though this section constitutes a mere 125 pages, its importance cannot be overstated for it provides the biblical-political framework for his positions reviewed in Part 2.

Part 2, Specific Issues, constitutes the bulk of the book. Grudem takes up and supports the social views favored by conservative Evangelicals on abortion, marriage laws, and separation of church and state. But Grudem also addresses topics traditionally emphasized by liberal Evangelicals, such as war, national defense, the CIA, international relations, foreign aid, the death penalty, environment, Social Security, illegal immigration, and affirmative action. While most of his positions fall in line with the conservative wing of the Republican party, readers will benefit from the systematic way the topics are

discussed and the argument Grudem uses to support his positions. I suggest that many Christian readers, buffeted by the assertions of the liberal media and higher education, will be gain a better appreciation for how conservative principles developed from a deep commitment to Biblical moral principles.

Part 3, Concluding Observations, discusses the nexus of politics, public policy, and how American Christians should vote. Grudem takes the controversial position of suggesting that Christians, for the present time, should vote Republican because of the Party's greater support of Christian ideals. Grudem correctly disputes the notion of objectivity noting that his critics didn't hold George Wallis of the Sojourners to the same standard.

With all the emphasis on being politically active, readers might expect that Grudem would end the book with a call for readers to start a political action committee. Not so. Grudem concludes by refocusing readers' attention to God's sovereignty and their own responsibility. With numerous scriptural references, Grudem inoculates Christians against apathetic despair or overoptimistic activism.

I must commend Grudem for taking up the topic of Christian participation in American politics. His decision to state his views on a variety of controversial topics speaks volumes about his character and love for the church.

Though supportive of a super-majority of Grudem's positions, I was disappointed with the quality and diversity of sources used to support the positions of himself and his opponents. Too often, Grudem relied on research proffered by conservative think tanks and reports from newspapers rather than consulting peer-reviewed publications. His use of weaker sources hurt his work in two ways. First, it limited the book's apologetic value as opponents will simply reject his arguments out of hand as derived from biased sources. Second, and perhaps more importantly, Grudem's sources limited the quality of his argumentation. On several occasions, Grudem's argument was too simplified. For example, though correctly explaining that concerns about world population growth are, and have been, vastly overblown, his argument that population densities and land-use statistics show there is a significant amount of land available for housing and crop production misses the larger point made by his opponents. Environmentalists and zero-growth population advocates contend that growth in population increases conversion of land to agriculture which in turn significantly impacts climate change at the global level but also on the viability of wildlife species at the local. Fair minded

people disagree on the causes of climate change, but when a species is only known to be in one location (e.g. Salt Creek Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela nevadica lincolniiana*), is it right to suggest that humans have a God-given right and even the responsibility to destroy its habitat for a new shopping mall? As an active proponent of human dominion over the animal kingdom, I don't think one needs to be a radical environmentalist to believe that humans have no right to cause a species to become extinct (contra. pp. 326,351).

Finally, I wish Grudem explicitly employed unifying frameworks to justify his views such as Kuyper's sphere sovereignty principle and John C. Rankin's principle of living in the light. For doing so, would have clarified how personal morality is intimately connected with fiscal prosperity and environmental care at both the personal and societal level.

Nevertheless, I still believe this text offers important benefits despite the lack of depth of some of the arguments. Grudem smartly covers the major arguments for and against many contemporary controversies in America. Instructors and students alike will find the book helpful in staging the issues and encouraging further research and lively discussion. Second, Grudem's irenic tone provides a welcome model that more Christians should copy when engaging in political conversation. Finally, I am grateful that Grudem avoided the academic fallacy (i.e. the notion that the truth is always the median of two positions) and clearly proclaimed his positions without condemning opponents to the fires of hell. Grudem's effort will allow Christians of all political persuasions have access to an established outline to help reduce confusions over terms and principles and thereby improve the quality of substantive debate over these matters.