

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Zion's Christian Soldiers? The Bible, Israel and the Church*,  
By Stephen Sizer. Nottingham: IVP, 2007. 199 pp. pb. £7.99.

ISBN-13: 978-1-84474-214-1

**Reviewed by Mark S. Sweetnam**

Stephen Sizer is a high-profile name among the opponents of Christian Zionism. Although raised in a dispensationalist context, and initially himself a dispensationalist with pro-Israel sympathies, Sizer has become a staunch opponent of both dispensationalism and Zionism and a leading voice for the Palestinian cause. This opposition was first expressed in his *Christian Zionism: Road Map to Armageddon* (IVP, 2004). This was a detailed, but often highly *ad hominem* account of the emergence of dispensationalism and Christian Zionism. The volume under review is a more popular level retelling of the same story. Where the earlier book focused on the historical unfolding of the movement, this more recent book examines key beliefs and concerns in contemporary Zionism, with the intent of debunking Christian Zionism's view of their importance.

The book begins with an introduction to Christian Zionism, and an account of its popularity, especially in the United States. There is no denying that the figures marshalled by Sizer are impressive: he makes a clear case for engaging with and understanding the movement. Having done so, he fails to profit from his own instruction by pivoting to an eye-catching speech by John Hagee in which he compared Iran to Germany, and Ahmadinejad to Hitler. This is strong stuff, and the quotations make Sizer's point very effectively. But here, as elsewhere in the book, he makes no attempt to examine or explain how Hagee relates to the mainstream of dispensationalism. This is the book's most serious flaw – Christian Zionism and dispensationalism are assumed to be identical, and both are depicted as decidedly monolithic systems of belief. Some attempt could be made to justify this by reference to the popular level at which the book is pitched, but, in reality, this places an even greater onus upon Sizer to be responsible about the way in which his opponents are presented. Somewhat ironically, the remainder of this chapter is occupied with protests about the way in which anti-Zionism is conflated with liberalism and anti-Semitism – Sizer needs to consider doing unto others what he would have done unto him!

At the close of chapter one, Sizer identifies Scripture as the basic source of authority. He picks up on this in the second chapter, asking whether it is possible 'to read the Bible too literally?' Sizer's answer, clearly, is 'yes'. Before demonstrating that, he lays out what he takes to be the three principles of correct Biblical interpretation: we must, he says, read Scripture literally, contextually, and progressively. He then moves on to discuss the particular challenges of prophecy and apocalyptic Scripture. The principles that Sizer enunciates in this section are convincing, and would be unexceptional to most evangelicals and even to most dispensationalists. But, with apparent artlessness, Sizer is still

pursuing his polemical purpose. He does this in two ways: firstly by implying that these principles – so manifestly reasonable – are ignored by Christian Zionists, leading to ‘very strange, tragic, and sometimes silly interpretations’ of Scripture (p.20). Secondly, in his call for a contextualised reading of Scripture, Sizer provides a chart that supposedly embodies contradictions between different passages of Scripture, if both are taken literally. This chart conveniently ignores the fact that a dispensational reading of Scripture eliminates most, if not all of these apparent difficulties. Sizer’s analysis suggests that dispensationalists, and not just their interpretations are staggeringly silly. This view is perpetuated in the second half of the chapter, in which Sizer examines five common mistakes made by ‘ultra-literalists.’ A quick glance through these demonstrates how skilfully Sizer has homed in on silly dispensationalists – almost all his points are substantiated by reference to or quotation from Hal Lindsey. Lindsey is silly enough for anything, but it is highly implausible, to say the least, to cast him as an ‘ultra-literalist’, or as a representative dispensationalist. Once again, Sizer is boxing with a straw man.

The third chapter deals with Israel and the Church. In it, Sizer does little more than rework the rather tired accusation that dispensationalism, by insisting on God’s future purpose for Israel, undervalues the Church, making her the ‘concubine’ and Israel ‘the wife’ (p.43) It requires no particularly painstaking research to establish that this is a misrepresentation of dispensationalism’s consistent position, but Sizer trots it all out, nonetheless, right down to the usual reference to dispensationalism’s supposed understanding of the Church as ‘merely “a parenthesis” to God’s future plans for the Jews’ (p.43). In this chapter, Sizer also makes a great deal of, not easily explicable, noise about the revisions to the notes of *The Scofield Reference Bible*. He repeatedly compares the revised version with the original in a way that suggests he has detected some attempt to pull the exegetical wool over the reader’s eyes. This, in spite of the fact that the revisions are normally minor in the extreme.

The next two chapters in the book move from theology to territory, addressing Zionist claims about Israel’s right to the land, and to the city of Jerusalem. It is in these chapters that the real downside of Sizer’s approach becomes apparent. He makes some interesting points, and raises some issues that are deserving of further consideration. But no space is allowed for the reader to consider them – Sizer presses relentlessly on, dragging in Hagee, Lindsey, and anyone else who fits his *ad hominem* purpose. The approach is self-defeating, because the argument for Scripture – which is, Sizer has already stated, the only one that matters becomes entirely displaced.

And the next chapter, which deals with plans to rebuild the temple, follows suit closely. Indeed, Sizer’s polemic rises to new heights – or sinks to fresh depths – of absurdity when he seems to suggest that the gap that dispensationalists see between verses 26 and 27 of Daniel Chapter nine – the gap in which the present age is contained – is a feature added to Biblical interpretation by ‘Lindsey and his colleagues’ to allow them to sell more books’ (121). This is

manifestly untrue, and Sizer knows it. However, he seems unable to resist the opportunity to put the polemical boot in, even at the expense of accuracy and fairness.

The penultimate chapter of the book discusses the Rapture and Armageddon. Predictably, it suggests that the dispensational 'secret rapture' is a recent aberration in the history of the Church, and the product of a mistaken exegesis. In proving this, Sizer is, once more, content to ignore the implications of a wider dispensational reading of Scripture. And, once again, he pivots to the most obviously extreme figures in the Christian Zionist spectrum to shock and alarm his readers.

The final chapter of the book provides a conclusion, surveying the content of earlier chapters. An appendix prints a sermon on 'the place of Israel' by John Stott.

Sizer's book engages with an important subject, and with some very large issues of Biblical interpretation and understanding. It never addresses them in a satisfactory way, however, because Sizer is too busily engaged in demonising his opponents, misrepresenting the mainstream, and silently imposing his own hermeneutical presuppositions upon Scripture. Frankly, the subject deserves better.

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*An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion: Classical and Contemporary Perspectives*, by Inger Furseth and Pål Repstad. Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2007. 241 pp. pb. £16.99. ISBN-13: 978-0546-5658-6

**Reviewed by Derek Tidball**

Throughout my career teaching the sociology of religion I have shunned the use of textbooks, not having found one that adequately covered the ground. Now, late in the day comes this superb offering by Furseth and Repstad which deserves wide use. If I were still teaching I would certainly use this book since it substantially covers the material I believe to be important. It achieves what its title claims. It introduces one to the debates and vast literature of the very lively discipline of the sociology of religion.

The book organises the complex field into twelve areas. It briefly introduces the nature of sociology and the subdiscipline's relation to general sociology before inevitably exploring what religion is. The later can be a boring and abstract exercise but Furseth and Repstad handle it well.

Attention turns to the teachings of the classical sociologists and includes not just the predictable Durkheim, Weber, Simmel and Freud but George Herbert Mead and Talcott Parsons as well. This is followed by an introduction to eight

contemporary sociologists. Some like Berger and Bourdieu have written directly on religion while others like Goffman, Giddens, Foucault and Bauman may have written hardly anything as such, but their general (and major) contribution to sociology bristles with implications. Substantive chapters cover religion, modernity, postmodernity and globalisation; religion in public life (secularisation) individual religiosity; religious organisations; religion as a socially cohesive or socially conflictual force; race and ethnicity and religions and gender. A final chapter discusses the relationship between faith and the sociological study of religion and is fine, as far as it goes, though a believer might look for more guidance at this point.

Writing such a book requires immense skill. Vast amounts of literature, theories and research have to be covered concisely but not simplistically. Not too many assumptions can be made if it is an introductory textbook, and yet a certain amount has to be assumed. In my view, Furseth and Repstad have almost wholly judged this aright. Very occasionally they can assume a little too much, but only rarely. Care is taken to draw out agreements and similarities between the various ideas so that patterns and consensus can be seen. Controversies, on the other hand, are introduced fairly and the debates handled even-handedly. The major criticisms of the various positions are introduced succinctly. The book represents the up-to-date state of the art as much as it is possible in any book which inevitably takes time to publish.

A further challenge in writing such a book is to know what to include and what to omit. Any reviewer will have their only list but, again, these authors have got it pretty near spot on in my judgement. A chapter on the sociology of a local congregation was perhaps the most serious omission. More might have been appreciated on the sociology of conversion, a fuller account of Wilson's typology of sects, charisma, the charismatic movement and institutionalisation, and something on evangelical and liberal Christianity, as distinct from fundamentalism. But judgements have to be made if the book is not to become unwieldy. There were one or two surprising omissions from the bibliography including Stark and Finke's latest statement of rational choice theory, *Acts of Faith*. Grace Davie's latest offering probably came too late for inclusion.

It was interesting to me that as I was reading the book every time I said, 'But what about...' they authors seemed to anticipate my question and move on to introduce another phase of the argument or the other side of the debate.

The chapters on religion and women, and religion and ethnicity, both essential topics, began to strain a little under the weight of excessive literature and ideological viewpoints. But that isn't altogether the authors' responsibility.

No one should be put off by the Scandinavian names on the front cover, rather the reverse. The English is clear and readable, much more so than some other books which serve as introductions to the theoretical side of the discipline. The exposition of a topic is thorough but not dense, and good signposting helps to find one's way through. For me one of the plus factors of the book is that it was written out of a Nordic context because it introduced me to quite a bit of

Scandinavian research which would not otherwise be widely known. Fully conversant with American sociological research into religions it includes European research and is not slanted towards American religion in a way American texts are.

I would make two suggestions, should a second edition be published, as I hope it will be. First, I would include a chapter on local congregations. Secondly, I would include a fuller contents page that detailed the sections of each chapter in addition to the brief contents page already printed.

If you are looking for a good university text, or simply a good introduction to the sociology of religion purely for your own personal interest, this is it.

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*Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America*, 2nd ed., by Ronald J. Sider Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007. 345 pp. pb. \$17.99. ISBN-13: 978-0-8010-6613-9.

**Reviewed by Amos Yong**

This professor of theology at Palmer Seminary in Philadelphia and president of Evangelicals for Social Action has been a prolific author and has served as a prophetic conscience for the North American church in general and the evangelical community in particular for the past generation. *Just Generosity* is vintage Sider: his evangelical commitments, passion for the gospel, clear-headed thinking, persuasive rhetoric, and sound recommendations will keep the reader turning the page. The goal is not only to convince the church about the need to engage issue of poverty in America, but also to provide some concrete guidelines for how to do so. Toward that end, Sider presents “a holistic, biblical vision for empowering the poor” (the title to part 2), carefully describes the poverty that needs to be alleviated, and makes specific social, economic, educational, medical, and political suggestions to deal with the problem.

However, *Just Generosity* is not just fanciful utopianism, and that for at least three reasons. First, Sider recognizes the need for a holistic approach. Part 3, “implementing the vision,” therefore addresses the following issues (in six chapters): employment, work, and income; broken families, including their causes and consequences, as well as the dynamics related to sexual integrity; health care (which includes a sample letter to our congressperson or senator urging health care reform); education, including educational reform and voucher options; welfare and welfare reform; and safety (including the challenge of developing safer neighbourhoods), taxes, social security, capital for the poor, metropolitan governance and justice, and faith-based community organizing. In other words, the sub-title of this volume needs to be taken seriously: this is a “new vision”

which deals with poverty not just at the symptomatic level but also at the level of its root causes across the board.

Second, Sider provides policy recommendations in which he interacts critically with the possible options. To take just one example, Sider comes down on the side of exploring the school voucher approach to reforming public education, and takes some time to defend it from its critics. However, rather than then positing such to be *the* solution to the woes of the American educational system, he calls for a carefully conducted and controlled five-year experiment in which a group of public school districts' reform initiatives would be compared and contrasted with the fortunes of another group of schools (perhaps in bounded areas of cities, or in a few selected whole cities) operating within a voucher framework. The results of such a project would confirm (or not) the viability of the voucher option in the long run. Such circumspection marks Sider's proposals at every stage, and he is alert to how any specific plan of action may have implications (intended or not) for other plans. Space constraints prevent me from considering the many other issues in more detail (but that is all the more reason for readers of this review to get this book).

Finally, however, Sider is an evangelical (of Mennonite and Wesleyan orientation), and is driven by theological convictions. But a biblical theology capable of speaking to the issue of poverty must be holistic. Hence the biblical foundations in this book deal with the nature of God, the nature of persons, the reality of sin, God's concern for the poor, the nature of capital, the meanings of Jubilee and Sabbath, the role of government, forms of generosity, the interrelatedness between justice and love, and the redemptive and restorative character of justice. Rather than siding with either "left" or "right," the proposals are informed by both-and thinking: moral considerations are just as important as socio-political ones, and poverty cannot be overcome by paying attention to only one side of the equation. So while a pro-family approach is defended on biblical grounds, it also might (and even should) be embraced for purely economic reasons which show that traditional two-parent families are less likely to be impoverished, and we also must provide a socio-political and legal (tax) framework that does not penalize marriage. In the end, then, the biblical vision of prosperity and justice needs to be translated into policies that nurture thriving communities and all that involves: "block clubs, local political clubs, local unions, schools, medical clinics, banks, strong families" (p. 271), etc. Biblical and theological holism, in other words, need to be correlated with a holistic social vision. Poverty is not a one-dimensional issue.

The second edition of this book appears eight years after the publication of the first edition (in 1999). This version is 33 per cent longer page-wise, although that may be in part because the font is slightly larger (and hence more readable). It does not appear that Sider has added new sections to the revised edition; however, he has fortified his earlier arguments and he has thoroughly updated the socioeconomic data across the volume (there are over 750 endnotes now compared to about 600 earlier). The Foreword by Charles W. Colson and

John J. DiIulio Jr and the Afterword by Eugene F. Rivers III have both been carried over verbatim, although readers may be interested in knowing that between editions, DiIulio served President George W. Bush for almost a year at the beginning of his presidency (in 2001) as the first director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (see DiIulio's account in his *Godly Republic: A Centrist Blueprint for America's Faith-Based Future*, University of California Press, 2007).

Being neither an economist nor political scientist, I will leave it to others more capable than I to critique the finer points of the proposals presented in *Just Generosity*. As a Christian concerned about the alleviation of poverty, however, this is an important and empowering book. It is focused on the American situation, so readers elsewhere will need to engage its ideas with an eye on the distinctive challenges in their own situation.

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*Theology of Money*, by Philip Goodchild. Beccles, Suffolk: SCM Press, 2007. 277 pp. sb. £24.99. ISBN-13: 978 0-334-04142-9.

**Reviewed by Geoffrey Holsclaw**

“God and money are competing sources of credit,” (214) each one funding our attention and devotion according to distinctive values. Such is the essential claim of Philip Goodchild's *Theology of Money*, which explores and elucidates the many dark corners of today's market capitalism. But Goodchild's work is not meant merely to stoke the flames of outrage against capitalism, but rather to probe its inner logic, its inner spirit, even its inner theology, in order to faithfully account for money's place in society. Goodchild's main concern is that money, with its implicit metaphysics, politics, ethics, and theology, has assumed the place of the master. And as we know, “No one can serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24).

To show that money is a competing source of credit, Goodchild divides his book into three parts. The first, ‘Of Politics’, is a general investigation into the political and social situation into which a theology of money is demanded. Goodchild argues that the conditions of modern politics, the idea of an individual with autonomous agency, have outgrown its usefulness. The “supersession of the autonomy of the state by finance capital” (23) has caused a shift in power of which politics and theology must give an account. Once an understanding of political energy is converted into the power of money, any politics desiring justice and equality must move through and transform the institutions of money. Because of this, money replaces the nation-state as the new political body demanding investigation (41). The second part, ‘A Treatise on Money’, details an ecology of money, seeking to supplement the one-side perspective of

understanding money merely as a means of exchange by seeking out how money is itself a productive force within the economy. Goodchild argues that money does not merely function as a means of exchange within a given social order, but actively erodes previous social orders while creating a society ordered around profitability. When money is examined merely according to the exchange of products then this obscures money's productive power. This other side of money concerns the creation of contracts of debt and credit which bind the users of money in a system which only seeks the good of future profit to the exclusion of all other goods (environmental, social, or spiritual). Goodchild argues that "money...has to be understood in terms of the social sphere of contractual obligations rather than in terms of a village market where products are exchanged" (101). This new social order, mediated by money, promises freedom and mobility, but only delivers bondage to the pursuit of making more money. Because of this, "the one who believes that he or she can do anything through money ends up doing anything for money" (80). In these ways, money becomes the master of our desires rather than a medium for our desires. The last part, 'Of Theology', spells out in detail what has been worked out in the previous parts, namely, that money functions essentially as credit, and for this reason has an implicit theology. Money functions in the realm of credit as a promise. This is so because the value of money is based in the social promise of respecting money as a means of exchange and in the personal promise that money will deliver one's desires (122). In these promises, money begins to control both the standard of evaluations in the present, and controls our hopes for the future. In both regards, money sets itself up as a rival to theology by declaring an alternative faith; a faith in money involving a metaphysics, a politics, an ethics, and a theology (216). In these ways, even against the intentions of those within the money system, all values become structured according to the value of money. Goodchild ends by outlining how, in the midst of these idolatrous problems, one might set up an alternative evaluative institution alongside the current financial institutions to direct money outside its pursuit of profits toward truly valuable projects.

Goodchild's book is at once compelling and frustrating. At times it moves through profoundly insightful articulations of our economic situation, but then falls into incredibly laborious sections that seem to wander. Its decidedly philosophical stance will be off-putting for those with a strictly economic background or those hoping for practical analysis. But for those willing to make the commitment to the book, it is quite rewarding, especially in regard to its theory of money.

When Goodchild is speaking about money, his book is compelling and insightful. However, the main problem with Goodchild's book is that it never moves beyond examining the theology of money implicit in the practices of money. Goodchild only develops 'money's theology' but never a 'Christian theology of money'. In this sense, Goodchild is working from the perspective of a 'philosophy of religion' rather than an explicitly Christian point of view, although the Christian tradition is his main source of inspiration. In fact,



Goodchild claims that “traditional theology, politics, and common sense have clashed with global capitalism and been found wanting” and therefore “it will be necessary to draw upon the theology of money to revise and deepen our understanding of theology, politics, and even of reason itself” (223-24). While for some this will prove suggestive and insightful, to many it will seem a provocative overstatement.

Even though Goodchild seems overly dismissive of traditional theology, and completely overlooks any consideration of the Church, his arguments concerning how the use of money infects and transforms every other social and spiritual values should stimulate some much needed theological reflection. In this regard, Goodchild’s book is recommended for those interested in either political theology or how economics might intersect with theology, but would be less helpful for those looking for practical solutions or biblical reflections on money.

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*The Rhetoric of Operation Rescue: Projecting the Christian Pro-Life Message*, by Mark Allen Steiner. New York: T & T Clark, 2006. 226 pp.  
pb. \$31.95. ISBN 0-567-02572-1

**Reviewed by Guy Lancaster**

The 2007 documentary *Unborn in the USA: Inside the War on Abortion* highlights a group of Christian anti-abortion activists who visit college and university campuses across the United States, where they assemble a monumental display of pictures of aborted fetuses, so large as to be impossible to miss. As the film rolls on, activists often end up in shouting matches with passersby who either object to the fundamental message or disagree with the means used to project it. In the end, no one’s views on abortion seem to have changed, and after the demonstration, one young activist admits that such is not even the goal: ‘But ultimately it’s not about winning an argument—it’s about pointing them to Truth.’

Such is precisely the reason the pro-life movement has been marginalized in recent years, according to Mark Allen Steiner, whose book, *The Rhetoric of Operation Rescue: Projecting the Christian Pro-Life Message*, should be required reading for anyone with a stake in the abortion controversy in America, as well as students of rhetoric, religious studies, and political science. Steiner examines the religious and political language utilized by Operation Rescue and its basis in evangelical theology, investigating through the group’s works the attitudes it possessed toward the issue of abortion as well as the larger American public. Ultimately, he argues, Operation Rescue’s downfall lay in its ‘failure to contend *rhetorically* for the meaning of abortion, and for the characterization of its

activists and acts,' which 'can be explained in part by its activists' particular understandings of truth and persuasion' (208).

Steiner opens with a definition of rhetoric as evangelism, writing that it 'functions more fundamentally and more powerfully in a *generative*, perspective-shaping capacity'—that is, 'rhetoric works to build our conception of what the truth is' (26)—before moving to examine what he calls the 'rhetorical ancestry' of Operation Rescue, outlining the core principles of evangelicalism and fundamentalism, especially as they are manifest in Francis A. Schaeffer's *A Christian Manifesto*, a book known to have been highly influential upon Operation Rescue founder Randall Terry. In Schaeffer's work, there is expressed a certain anti-intellectualism and an impulse to hegemony, especially the belief that 'pluralism in any significant sense is impossible; it is either one total entity or another that dominates political and cultural life' (66–67). Operation Rescue simplifies history by its representation of the *Roe v. Wade* decision as completely discontinuous with history and medical practice up to that time, therefore creating a moment of crisis often compared to the Nazi Holocaust. With this view in mind, the group thus 'rhetorically reconstructs abortion as the single touchstone by which one identifies with the evangelical Christian faith' (98). Activism, in this light, is the equivalent of holy war, with the protest sites made into battlefields and counter-protestors and police the enemy—all a rhetorical strategy that provides motivation but leaves pro-life activists unable to 'find significant common ground with their adversaries, or even with people who do not entirely agree with them' (127).

This is reflected in the group's view of the American public at large: 'In Operation Rescue's conception, the public has no agency in weighing truth claims and actively deciding what is right or wrong. The public, further, plays no active role in interpreting acts and truth claims; rather, the public can respond or not respond to acts and truth claims that are self-evident, obvious' (162). Fundamentalist notions of truth as self-evident thus were reflected in Operation Rescue's adoption of a poor rhetorical strategy that left the public, in their view, as either virtuous but deceived—which meant that activists simply needed to shout the truth in public to sway opinion—or complicit in the evil of abortion—in which case activists filled a prophetic role in condemning the nation entire. Neither strategy was fit for the public that actually existed, thus allowing pro-choice forces to seize the day, rhetorically—Steiner devotes a whole chapter to studying the 1993 U.S. Senate hearing on the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act to demonstrate how pro-choice vocabulary had become the common currency in the debate precisely because Operation Rescue and like organizations failed 'to contest meaningfully pro-choice delegitimizing vocabulary, as well as to engage the public adequately with its own rhetorical vocabulary' (195).

An evangelical himself, Steiner concludes his book by calling for 'a corrective to the rhetorical practices of evangelicals' which he believes 'might do much to help them—in their public engagement with culture and in their political

activism—realize the good and helpful role they can play in a democratic, pluralistic society’ (212). This corrective has five components: a greater sensitivity to audience and context, a cultivation of critical thinking as a fundamental value, a greater appreciation of humility rather than the impulse to hegemony, a cognizance of the power of rhetoric, and a use of rhetoric that presents a more nuanced perspective on both Christian faith and public engagement.

Steiner’s affiliation with Pat Robertson’s Regent University may give many theological and political liberals pause, while his concluding call for the Christian pro-life movement to temper its rhetoric may likewise draw the ire of diehard conservatives, but no one interested in the intersection of American civic and religious life can afford to ignore this book. If it has one fault, it is that Steiner presents Operation Rescue’s rhetoric as the sole factor in the group’s downfall. He ignores the strange career of Randall Terry, who was censured by his church for a ‘pattern of repeated and sinful relationships and conversations with both single and married women,’ ditched his wife for a woman sixteen years his junior, moved to Nashville to try to establish himself as a country music star, and had a history of shady financial dealings—all of which did much to demoralize many in the pro-life movement and paint Terry in the public mind as merely another hypocritical holy-roller. However, Steiner’s analysis of the political and religious language of Operation Rescue proves quite enlightening, and the recommendations he imparts to his evangelical audience can only strengthen American democratic traditions by bringing Christians into the public square as full participants in civil discourse.

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*The Rise and Demise of Black Theology*, by Alistair Kee.

Series: Reclaiming Liberation Theology. London, SCM, 2008. xii+234pp.  
pb. £19.99. ISBN-13: 978-0-334-04164-1

**Reviewed by Colin Warner**

This interesting and sometimes provocative book opens with a concise but well-informed and well-documented history of the beginnings of Black Theology among African American people in the USA. The author carries his readers along a trajectory that leads from an earlier form of negritude, through black consciousness, black power to the initial forms of black theology. The roots of *Negritude* was a philosophy of life, and the keystone of the consequent ideology designed to describe a new vision of the black person’s place, a reaching out for an ancient black culture. This re-birth of black consciousness began with a vision for the unifying of the black peoples in a return to Africa as their Fatherland. The

contest was between moderates looking for separation without hatred and radicals calling for revolution and if justified violence.

Freedom was to be won in conflict and not received through charity. It was felt that protection against injustice could only come through possessing power, physical, financial and scientific. This opened the door for appearance of Black Power, an assertion of rights and a declaration of intent to gain and use power to bring about true freedom.

This led to a black Christian response, which birthed a clear expression of early Black Theology. Rejecting integration and seeking to identify itself Black, Christianity through the emerging black church perceived itself to be a Nation, with their Exodus was away from the white oppressors and slave-owners. Their black Messiah Jesus was seen as their liberator, dying to set them free from the white domination of their European masters. Black Christianity and Black Power became linked together in the demand for freedom.

Attention turns to the South African scenario and the Apartheid era. The key figures in the development of the Black Consciousness movement were indirectly influenced by the writings and ideas of their Afro-American cousins. The religious beliefs of the white settlers legitimized apartheid, and thereby put Christianity in the dock. The context differed from that experienced by the Afro-American black people. The theology of Apartheid had described a God who willed the dominance of white races, and that had to be challenged. Black Theology in South Africa identified racism as the underlying evil that had to be addressed. All forms of authoritarianism were challenged, even the titles given by white theologians for God, which served the purpose of a white, dominant minority.

A discussion on the relationship between Black Theology and Feminist Theology leads to a description of Womanist Theology. Feminism in the USA had argued the case for a white professional minority of women who wanted equality with white professional men. Furthermore Black consciousness and consequently Black Theology had contended only for the rights of black men to be equal in social status, economic potential and employability with their white counterparts. Neither of the parties had contended for the rights and emancipation of black women. It was an attempt to link sexism to racism in what was signified by this term womanism. This sought from a Christian perspective to address sexism and racism, but also raised the issue of classism. The author offers a somewhat scathing critique of womanist theology arguing that it is neither truly womanist nor theological. With the authority of the Bible, Church traditions and the ancient Christian Creeds all set aside, womanist theology begins where downtrodden black women struggle for liberation. The antagonism to capitalism and favouring of Marxist socialism is evaluated, and a significant critique offered of womanist theology and its dependence upon autobiographical literature.

A new chapter begins with a contrast between exiled Africans in the USA, and South Africans as dispossessed, occupied by white colonialists and UK immigrants coming from post-colonial independent countries. Different issues

therefore create a different agenda. The focus is upon the second generation of the Afro-Caribbean community in the UK as an ethnic group within British society. The problem initially is not one of race, or even colour but rather of class. This latter issue brings our attention back to the subject of black women's lives in Britain. Recognizing the importance of religion among black people as a significant factor in society, Kee turns his attention to the possibility of the creation of a Black Theology in the UK context.

In my opinion this call for a Black Theology in the UK can only serve to destroy any real hopes for reconciliation and harmonization of theology and faith between black and white believers in the context of British Christianity. It widens the divide when what we need is a bridge. Kee acknowledges the extent of secularization in the UK, yet seems to believe that a Black Theology could affect the attitudes of an irreligious majority of white people on the racist issue. Surely unifying the black and white churches is a more relevant and achievable task. A united Christian front would have more effect than a theological divide and distinction that would create an even greater reason for disunity among UK believers. Why is there no evaluation of a uniting evangelical theology? The chapter ends with a very negative review of all other forms of liberation theologies.

In discussing the demise of Black Theologies in the light of postmodernism, Kee seems to have a problem in defining *blackness*, a term with which he wrestles in a way that reflects his own discomfort with the term. Is it part of the natural order, a social construct, an ontological reality or a political convenience? Linguistic analysis comes into play here. In his opinion "the old strategies do not address the new conflict". It moves the reader through the subjects of gender and race, but mainly to the issue of classism, which in his opinion all black theologies have failed to adequately address. The radical conclusion reached is that all three forms of Liberation Theology have come to the end of their natural term of life and usefulness. With the dominance of capitalism in a technological age the moral basis of the call for liberation has collapsed, while the poor get poorer and the middle classes grow and seek only to preserve their economic status and privilege. The book closes with a rather presumptuous obituary for Black Theology in its past format, and calls for a universal theology, aided by black and white theologians, that seeks political and economic power for those deprived of it.

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