

Tripp York and Chuck Seay. *Third Way Allegiance: Christian Witness in the Shadow of Religious Empire*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2011.

*Third Way Allegiance: Christian Witness in the Shadow of Religious Empire* concisely engages the entangled commitments of many US Christians to the gospel of Christ and the ruling powers of the state. It invites readers to critically engage “life as a Christian under the post-Christian, yet exceptionally religious, empire that is the United States of America” (13) and not to assume a convergence of “Christian” and “American” values. The authors seek to foster discussion among believers who read the book together. Each of its three major parts contains six chapters, and nearly every chapter comprises a historical narrative introducing the topic and a critical appraisal of the actions recounted and their relevance for faith today. Each chapter includes questions to guide small groups in discussing the issues.

Part one, “Our People,” shares the witness of individuals whose lives “would be unintelligible if God does not exist” (17). It responds to influences of the New Atheists (e.g., Harris, Dawkins), who claim non-theistic rationalities are objective and incontrovertible. These frameworks, the authors suggest, have crept into the church and have led to a demise in Christian practice by creating people who believe in God but live as if God did not exist. The witness of those encountered in this section encourages believers to reject complacency in such arenas as environmental and animal ethics, poverty, racism, coercive violence, and the place of Christian rationality among rival conceptual frameworks.

Part two, “Our Politics,” argues that Christianity should not embrace the politics of surrounding cultures, acting in “complicity with the empire’s understanding of what it means to be political” (48), but rather witness to the politics of the gospel. The latter should guide Christians not only in criticizing American policy but in influencing and changing the state; evangelism is an implicit focus here. Chapters in this section introduce nonviolent political alternatives, calling into question US participation in capital punishment, terrorism, militarism, state idolatry, and the supposed egalitarianism of certain forms of democracy.

Part three, “Our Praise,” deals with Christian participation “in the state’s liturgy in hopes of showing the difference between what makes one a

Christian and what makes one, to speak crudely, an ‘American,’ and critiques several civic holidays used to make “us its disciples” (82). These liturgies impact all aspects of American life, including church life. The emphasis is primarily on the violence supported in American practices, economic abuse, and the covering up of genocidal militaristic policies.

*Third Way Allegiance* is an invaluable resource for rethinking church practices today, and many chapters apply to a wider North American context, engaging Canadian as well as American believers. The authors continually point to the implicit violence underlying much of the political power exercised in the US and its global allies that many Christians take to be compatible with the politics of the church, failing to recognize that the gospel witness advocates a nonviolent, anti-imperial approach to politics and social relationships. Especially helpful are the historical examples and gospel examples that suggest an alternate politics. The book’s format makes it ideal for small groups to navigate a renewed approach to Christian ethics, and the topics are highly relevant in a North American context, focusing on the horrors of military violence, economic disparity, racism, and the destruction of the other-than-human world.

For all its merits, *Third Way Allegiance* is weak in a few areas of theology, particularly in its exclusivist perspective that (unintentionally?) disparages those outside the church as simply in rebellion toward God and not offering anything politically or ethically viable. The strong emphasis on the church/world dichotomy paints the former as the sole bastion of light in a dark world and the latter as having nothing helpful to say. Such a position is theologically suspect and empirically dubious, given the overlap of Christian and non-Christian attitudes toward the nonviolent politics and ethics supported in this book.

*Third Way Allegiance* also leaves one feeling as though a person can be purely within one tradition without being influenced by others. Attempting to discern what is “gospel” and what is “outside culture” seems misguided, as the makeup of any tradition is wildly complex, arising out of a matrix of dialogical relationships. The authors could offer more grace to others and recognize the wisdom of different traditions, even aspects labeled “American.” One could agree with all the ethical and political positions adopted without polarizing the church and the world, instead accepting the

dynamic complexities and nuances of all traditions, some of which perhaps could even positively change the church.

All in all, this challenging book is a valuable contribution to North American church life. It is sure to spark powerful dialog, calling Christians to reject the violence seen all too often in the state in favor of the nonviolent politics at the heart of the gospel and Jesus' love for neighbor and enemy alike.

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Ronald J. Sider, ed. *The Early Church on Killing: A Comprehensive Sourcebook on War, Abortion, and Capital Punishment*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012

For many years Ron Sider has written about Christian attitudes to life issues, and has advocated Christian nonviolence and a consistently pro-life approach to war, abortion, and capital punishment. In *The Early Church on Killing* he brings his historian's training to bear on the search for roots in the first three centuries of the church's history. He is aware that Christians today are often selectively pro-life; so he finds it illuminating to study abortion (which many oppose) together with war and capital punishment (which many favor).

His method in this book is to assemble all the relevant material in one place, punctuated by his own commentary, which draws upon the extensive scholarly writing on the subject. He is aware that he has theological convictions and he states his own Anabaptist perspective; but he is determined that as far as possible he will eliminate bias from his historical judgments, for he views it as "fundamentally immoral" (14) to slant texts to fit a pre-existing ideological position. Where there are texts that are ambiguous or (from his vantage point) problematic, he is determined to