

Recognizing the strong links to the Diaspora Muslim communities of North America and Europe, and attending to immigrant experiences can also send positive messages. Taking more steps to “ensure inclusion of Muslims in Western societies” will shape Muslim perceptions globally. The degree to which immigrants have a positive experience with education and economic opportunities, freedom of religious expression, respectful coexistence, and a fair rule of law will help diplomatic efforts between different societies (261). “By contributing to the radicalization of young Muslim men, overmilitarization of the ‘war on terror’ has done more to destabilize the Muslim Middle East than to cultivate a basis for sustainable peace” (261). Western approaches abroad need to be consistent with those at home, lest hypocrisy damage the viable democratic projects taking place in the Middle East region (262).

*Islam and Peacemaking in the Middle East* will benefit all who read it not only for its historical information and its insights into Islam as a religious, political, and cultural resource for Middle East peacemaking, but for a better understanding of the nuances of peacemaking where communities face deep-rooted misperceptions, power imbalances, and ongoing trauma. It provides points of contact for doing comparative theologies with Christians, Jews, and others in peace theology and peacebuilding, as well as avenues for dialogue between the Muslim community and the West.

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John G. Stackhouse, Jr. *Making the Best of It: Following Christ in the Real World*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Canadian evangelical theologian John Stackhouse has written a “big, academic book” that articulates a “comprehensive” understanding of culture and the Christian life in light of the reality of God (ix, 4). As the title suggests, the argument of *Making the Best of It* is that discipleship is rightly negotiated in the midst of present-day cultural and political activities. Disciples

maximize faithfulness to God from situation to situation, prioritizing neither consistency nor purity but rather adequate response to God in this morally ambiguous post-lapsarian world. Stackhouse presents this argument as an updated evangelical Christian Realism that embraces the contingencies and tragedies of modern life without labeling this embrace as a compromise.

The author presents his evangelical Realist pantheon in the first two parts of the book. In the first part he “reappropriates” H. Richard Niebuhr’s Christ and Culture typology. He defends the validity of this typology so long as each type is taken as a legitimate strategy for different Christians at different times and places. The second part of the book lifts themes from the life and works of C.S. Lewis, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. These luminaries offer resources for a comprehensive realism that surveys culture in light of God’s action. In the third part, Stackhouse presents his version of Realism. He starts by defining his method: Christian ethics is a dynamic “conversation” between scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, under the power of the Holy Spirit and oriented towards Jesus. The pneumatological aspect of this method is especially important, as it allows Stackhouse to subordinate methodical ethical investigation to what God might ask of us in any given situation (179). Yet we have to understand each situation with reference to its place in the grand “Christian Story” of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.

From that story we learn that discipleship is about both the individual and society, the spiritual and the material, unity and diversity, the world to come and this world, and God’s interests and human interests (202-205). Although Christians have a special calling, it is “nested” within God’s larger demand that humans seek peaceful cultural flourishing or *shalom* (220). Because we live between fall and eschaton, *shalom* cannot be fully attained. Vocational discernment is necessary for individuals and congregations, and there will be a great diversity of faithful, *shalom*-seeking responses. God may have a “normal” will for culture, but that will is constantly adjusted to bring the most *shalom* out of each fallen situation. Faithfulness to such a God means integrity and effectiveness cannot be divorced (293). It means making the best of every area of culture.

Like other Christian Realists, Stackhouse sees his primary opponents to be Christians who think discipleship requires separation from some

areas of cultural activity, and specifically from violence (195-98, 279-88). This strategy is represented throughout the volume by John Howard Yoder and the Anabaptist tradition, although Stackhouse recognizes that not all Anabaptists follow this line (24). Actually, he says he is writing to surpass both withdrawal and “take-over” options (5-6), but defeating the latter is not integral to his argument. Yoder is the major target because his is “the most attractive and provocative alternative” to the author’s own model (310). For readers of this journal, the engagement with Yoder is probably the book’s most interesting feature. It is an exemplar of the parasitic dependence on a distorted reading of Yoder that too often characterizes Christian Realism.

Stackhouse seems to have read very little of Yoder’s work, and most of his comments are restricted to isolated quotations from *The Priestly Kingdom*. From this scant textual basis Yoder is accused of reducing scripture to the gospels (192, n16); holding an immanent eschatology (276); failing to discuss the possibility of Christians wielding political power (276, n9); advocating cultural “withdrawal” (278-79); “abandoning” the world (281, n19); and refusing to give examples of successful nonviolent action (286). For anyone familiar with the scope of Yoder’s writings, this portrayal is libelous. But without it Stackhouse lacks a *raison d’être* for his denial of the radical imitation of Christ. By equating radical discipleship with irresponsible withdrawal, he can present his option as responsible engagement. If pacifism can be responsible and engaged, then his argument founders. The new Realism is the same as the old. Long live Realism.

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Miroslav Volf. *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.

In this collection of essays on theological interpretation of Scripture, Miroslav Volf expresses his conviction that it is the Bible that ultimately serves as the wellspring of theology, its source of life and vigor. As a biblical scholar by training, I do not always find it easy to understand what theologians do with