



## Reviews



**Kenneth R. Himes, *Christianity and the Political Order: Conflict, Cooptation, and Cooperation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2013), pp. 359, ISBN 978-1626980280. £26.99**

I have found it interesting to review Himes' account of theological thought about political systems in the same week that I have seen photographs of Orthodox priests amidst protesting crowds in Kiev, the Ugandan President has signed into law harshly discriminatory anti-homosexuality legislation for which it is alleged that the Anglican church in Uganda has been lobbying for some time, the Governor of Arizona vetoed a bill that would have allowed business owners and employees including some on the government payroll to refuse to serve someone on the grounds of sincerely held religious beliefs, the Church of Scotland published its contribution to the Scottish independence debate, and I watched the first episode of the TV series, *The Borgias*.

Himes offers a scholarly and accessible presentation of key ideas and events in the Christian tradition of not only conceptualizing the political ordering of life together but also practising it. As we might expect, Himes takes his reader from the Old and New Testaments through the Patristic and medieval eras to the ages of reform then revolution. A discussion of church and state in the U.S. context brings the historical section to a close. Anyone seeking an overview of what Christians have thought about the relationship between church and state in different periods will find Himes' book to be digestible; he gets the balance between detail and conciseness just right.

Himes has been a Franciscan friar for almost forty years and teaches at Boston College, a leading Roman Catholic university. His context and intellectual interests are rightly foregrounded in the second part of this book in which he discusses recent Catholic theological understandings of the state. His chapter, "Why the Church is Engaged in Politics" could be a valuable resource for stimulating ecumenical discussion not only amongst students of political theology

but thoughtful Christian people of any denominational affiliation.

Observers of domestic U.S. politics will come away from Himes' work with a deepened appreciation of a Catholic perspective that, at least from this side of the Atlantic, tends to be drowned out by the Protestant Religious Right. When some lobbyists and commentators seem intent upon 'Americanizing' British and Scottish politics, the sophisticated discussion of churches and single-issue voting is salutary reading. One does not need to agree with the Roman Catholic church's stance on abortion (or any other moral issue) to benefit from reflecting on Himes' scholarly exploration.

A final chapter examines Catholic understanding of international politics where the questions of common good and human rights feature prominently. The developing approach to rights language within Catholic teaching is important to understand and Himes does a good job of demonstrating the main shifts. For a broader discussion readers might find Esther Reed's *The Ethics of Human Rights* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007) a useful supplement.

In what is a valuable textbook for undergraduate courses in Christian political theology, Himes makes a significant contribution. In this genre he is, quite rightly, not making any original proposals for reframing Christians' understanding of the political order (which, as he explains is wider than merely party politics). As a result, this book provides the reader with a solid foundation from which she might branch out into areas of special interest.

I do, however, have one major negative criticism and it is directed towards the General Editor of the series in which Himes' book appears. The series is titled, "Theology in Global Perspective" and so I expected insights and experiences from polities grappling with unfolding democracy after repression, tensions within postcolonial states, and how the church makes her contribution where corrupt governments, powerful transnational lobbying organizations and the interests of disenfranchised people are matters of life and death. The 'global' in this series seems to mean, here at least, rather the same as 'world' in the World Series baseball tournament. This is not to blame Himes but to raise a perennial problem with US-centric publications. There is a positive good in discussing theological themes, especially the church and the political order, in context rather than generalised

terms. It is another matter altogether when such an attenuated understanding of global is perpetuated. Gaining critical distance in order to see the negative, as well as positive, impact on the world beyond Western capitalist interests is made all the harder. For a very different perspective that could be usefully read in conjunction with Himes' U.S.- and Western-centric text I would recommend Miguel A. De La Torre (ed.), *Ethics: A Liberative Approach* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2013).

This is not to take away from the considerable value of Himes' substantial book but to set it in a wider context – especially when it purports to be 'theology in global perspective'.

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**Myk Habets, *Theology in Transposition: A Constructive Appraisal of T. F. Torrance* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), pp. 228, ISBN 978-0800699949. £25.99**

2013 marked the one hundredth anniversary of Thomas Forsyth Torrance's birth. It is perhaps fitting, then, that the year also marked the publication of this volume, which constitutes the best introduction to Torrance's thought to date. Theological introductions can be rather hit-and-miss, as scholars who attempt to summarize every point and subpoint of a given theological system run the risk of confusing or overwhelming the reader, rather than assisting them. Habets instead provides an exploration of six central and crucial themes in Torrance's overall theological vision, thus laying the necessary groundwork for readers to go off and study Torrance's theology on their own. Furthermore, Habets provides some critical and constructive interactions with Torrance that will make this volume of interest to experienced scholars. This volume thus not only gives budding Torrance scholarship the tools it needs to investigate his thought, but also a directive to build upon it. For Torrance, dogmatics was never an entirely finished or settled work, and this volume continues in that