

CHRISTIAN SOCIAL THOUGHT

The Invisible Hand in the Wilderness: Economics, Ecology, and God

Malcom Clemens Young

Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2014 (270 pages)

This book is the latest attempt to develop a comprehensive understanding of the relationships among economics, ecology, and theology. An integral understanding of the point of contact among these three disciplines is essential for people of faith to live in the contemporary world, which frequently pits the disciplines against one another. In this volume, Malcolm Clemens Young, an Episcopal priest, attempts to develop an understanding of the symbols used in each of the three disciplines to reintegrate them. He sees his work as an attempt to recreate a previous era where diverse disciplines, like those under consideration in this volume, were studied together. Young hopes his approach will illuminate the human negligence he believes is the source of many problems in the environment.

The book is divided into nine chapters in addition to an introduction and a conclusion. In the first chapter, Young describes the changing face of the environment. He summarizes the symptoms of environmental degradation and seeks to describe the relationship between a consumer culture and ecological distress. The second chapter is a call for theological interest in the created order. Young's assertion is that people of faith are compelled to respond to his ecological complaint. In the third chapter, Young unpacks the relationship between social values and economics. He shows how the values of people and societies impact the economic choices they make, including how they relate to the created order. The fourth chapter is Young's evaluation of the usefulness of economics and value theory. This chapter, as well as the next, is a continuation of the arguments begun in chapter 3.

Young describes the limits of economics in chapter 5, arguing that economic models are social constructs and largely unsuitable as forecasting tools. Economics is, therefore, merely a means of making the best sense of an otherwise irregular world.

In the sixth chapter, Young shifts to a discussion of symbols and symbolization. Here he is describing the systems of symbols people use to represent environmental, economic, and theological concepts. His argument in this chapter is that symbols are human constructs. Instead of discovering meaning in the world, humans are making meaning through symbols. Chapter 7 is a discussion of historical attitudes toward property. Young discounts the notion that private property is a natural right and argues that it is one of several options that are useful for a functional human society. In the final two chapters, Young finally discusses theology explicitly. Chapter 8 argues that the idea of God, a symbol in which humans build meaning, is essential for establishing interest beyond the singular self. God is a human construct that is useful for reminding people there is an Other to which people are subject. In the ninth chapter, Young modifies three of H. Richard Niebuhr's categories to describe potential relationships between God (not Christ) and culture. He unpacks the paradigms of God against culture, God of culture, and God transforming culture. This transformationalist perspective, Young argues, enables interfaith, interdisciplinary dialogue that can lead to resolving the environmental difficulties of the day. Theological language, with carefully constructed symbolic language, has the potential to enhance those discussions.

The greatest strength of this volume is the earnest attempt to draw ecology, economics, and theology into conversation. Young's work in that regard is commendable. In an era of increasing specialization, interdisciplinary conversations are often made difficult because of a general malaise toward other fields of study. Another strength is the recognition of the power of symbols, which have meaning and are useful for communicating. Often, their meaning is confused or freighted with historical significance. This volume works as a call to careful use and interpretation of symbols.

There are some points in the volume worthy of critique as well. Young demonstrates resistance to objectivity in his epistemology that tends to undermine the ability to communicate. If humans are making meaning instead of demonstrating meaning in the created order, then the use of symbols has the potential to confound communication because of epistemological differences between individuals and cultures. An attempt at objectivity seems necessary if effective communication is to occur. Second, there is open skepticism about market economic principles in this volume to the extent that Young does not fairly represent the concepts. This inhibits the very conversation among disciplines that the book is intended to encourage. In addition, it seems that Young has tried too hard to use the broadest terms possible to bring many people into the conversation. This led him to replace *Christ* with the generic *God* in the final chapter, which in application reflects the abandonment of the distinctiveness of the Christian worldview. These factors tend to make the volume less helpful to many readers than it could have been.

Young's project is a worthy one. He surveys several subjects, bringing three distinct disciplines into conversation. Despite its limitations, Young's efforts at integration make

The Invisible Hand in the Wilderness a worthwhile addition to the ongoing debate about solutions to ecological problems in the world.

—Andrew J. Spencer
Oklahoma Baptist University

Globalization and Orthodox Christianity: The Transformations of a Religious Tradition

Victor Roudometof

New York: Routledge, 2014 (228 pages)

In *Globalization and Orthodox Christianity*, sociologist Victor Roudometof aims to contribute to the scholarly shift in the study of religion from secularization to globalization. His study of Orthodox Christianity is meant to be paradigmatic for future studies of other religious traditions. In the process, he also seeks to dispel common, cliché, and Western-centric concepts of the public role of Orthodoxy and the various Orthodox hierarchical centers and institutions. The goals of the book are thus diverse but limited in scope by its focus on a single religious tradition, Orthodox Christianity. Additionally, it is important to note that the study only marginally touches on the economic aspects of globalization; expanded treatment might have helped to further problematize the sociological analysis.

Key to Roudometof's study is the argument that globalization, unlike secularization, is not a purely modern phenomenon. This gives him the justification, in chapters 2 and 3, for surveying history from the Emperors Constantine and Justinian in the Christian East, to the rise of the Carolingian dynasty in the West and concurrent theological controversies, to the era of the Crusades and the 1204 sack of Constantinople, to the late Byzantine Empire and its downfall to the Ottomans in 1453, to the rise of the Russian Empire. Rather than simply presuming Orthodox Christianity in its modern form, he avoids the pitfall of anachronism by tracing its historical development while, at the same time, demonstrating key themes of his overall study, including one overarching thesis: Orthodoxy has responded and adapted to globalization in a variety of ways all throughout its history, rather than being an adversarial, ossified artifact of the past (as it can sometimes be portrayed from the point of view of secularization). He does not, for that, deny Orthodoxy's traditional and conservative nature, but he adeptly demonstrates that this characteristic has not been a barrier to adaptation and should not be an excuse for sloppy oversimplification by scholars.

The rest of the book examines the early modern era of the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, the modern era of the nineteenth century to 1945, and the current global age post-1945. In the course of the study, he highlights how the church-nation link found so commonly in Eastern Europe is itself a modernization of institutional and cultural relations rather than a simple resistance to modernity. In addition, this model is not the only one present and active today. To demonstrate this, four concepts recur throughout the study, offering a nuanced picture of the historical, institutional development of this