

In other words, Maimonides altered the practice without a significant systemic deviation. In fact, one could argue that there is an ironic conservatism in the way in which he formulates his novel rulings. Cohen notes that Maimonides often masks his innovations behind Talmudic terminology. Such a conclusion is unnecessary. Rambam asserted, as Cohen himself notes (16–18), that his conclusions reflect the straightforward meaning on the Talmud (*Talmud arukh*). As the late Isadore Twersky demonstrated, Maimonides meant that his formulations reflected the true meaning (whether explicit or implicit) of his sources. If Twersky is correct, Maimonides harkened back to Talmudic forms in his *prima facie* greatest adaptations because he was convinced that they were innately rooted within the *corpus receptus* of Talmudic commercial law. Indeed, in light of the strong Talmudocentrism of all of Maimonides's writings, one should not expect otherwise.

Nevertheless, the present volume is a pathbreaking study that will enrich multiple fields of research. Its multivalent impact is most apt for a scholar whose net is spread over so many disciplines.

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The Blessings of Business: How Corporations Shaped Conservative Christianity

Darren E. Grem

New York: Oxford University Press, 2016 (304 pages)

Darren E. Grem in his new book *The Blessings of Business: How Corporations Shaped Conservative Christianity* artfully composes a chronological narrative of the previously overlooked, largely forgotten, and seemingly unlikely historical relationship between conservative evangelical Christianity and American corporations. The illumination of this overlooked history and development of conservative evangelicalism, Grem contends, reveals that evangelicalism was arguably influenced more in board rooms than from pulpits. Grem's purpose is threefold: First to reveal to the reader how evangelicalism has been influenced historically (both publicly and privately) by prominent businessmen and corporations. Second, he aims to reveal the corporate features and business culture of American Christianity and conservative evangelicalism. Third, he seeks to demonstrate the interconnectedness of conservative evangelicalism with American corporate capitalism.

Grem divides his work into two main sections. The first section principally focuses on the first half of the twentieth century, highlighting the role of prominent (although largely forgotten) American businessmen like Herbert Taylor, J. Howard Pew, and R. G. LeTourneau, and their relationship with evangelical leaders such as Billy Graham. The content of this section centers on the influence and financial backing of what Grem labels as evangelical fundamentalism. The financial backing of businessmen during this time period enabled the founding of evangelical academic institutions like Moody Bible Institute, Biola University, Westminster Theological Seminary, and Fuller Theological Seminary.

Grem also discusses the financial support of these businessmen and their corporations in establishing numerous evangelical organizations such as Campus Crusade for Christ, Young Life, The Navigators, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, *Christianity Today*, and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

The second section of this work evaluates the latter half of the twentieth century (1960s–1990s), giving particular attention to the manner in which conservative evangelicalism itself became a big business. Grem begins this section with an introduction to the complex evangelicalism-business amalgamation that is the (somewhat controversial) Chick-fil-A Corporation. Additional discussion is given to other larger corporations and a multiplicity of smaller businesses that were founded or owned by evangelicals. Grem links (whether correctly or incorrectly) corporatism with evangelicalism, as the phenomenon of evangelicals starting and owning businesses exponentially increased in this period. This section also covers various topics such as the rise of TV evangelism, Christian media and publishing, and the politicizing of evangelicalism through individuals such as Jerry Falwell and even US president Ronald Reagan.

An immediate highlight to note is the excellent and intentional division and balance of Grem's work. This book's six chapters are evenly distributed between the first and second halves of the twentieth century, each highlighting a prominent business leader and corporation that was a critical influence on evangelicalism. Interestingly, albeit ironically, Grem does not actually drill down into either business or economics as academic fields, which may leave the reader somewhat disappointed if he or she had expected that. Rather, Grem introduces the reader to the world of historical American business people and personalities who were successful in promoting their "brand" of conservative evangelical Christianity through business.

Ultimately, Grem provides a thoughtful and detailed analysis of the influence conservative evangelical businesses and corporations have had on society. Grem successfully reveals how the historical self-identification and branding of the United States as a Christian nation enabled the promotion of conservative evangelicalism in both business and society at large. Yet, he falls short in his approach, ideological assertions, and one-sided presentation of how corporate profits flow to evangelical causes. Grem, for example, portrays business tycoon R. G. LeTourneau as paying evangelicals to speak at company meetings, and Chick-fil-A's corporate headquarters as having a walking trail lined by plaques displaying Bible verses. However overtly these associations with evangelical Christianity might be, certainly Christian leaders and businessmen are not the only ones who attempt to inject their own moral, religious, and sociopolitical preferences and worldviews into the organizations they lead. Grem's criticism of Christian fundamentalists who financed evangelical-fundamentalist causes is in some ways itself an ironically fundamentalist approach. Furthermore, Grem's conclusions about the relationship between evangelicalism and businesses appear to align these corporations' goals with religious values, rather than with proper business metrics (i.e., increasing profit, controlling cost, and limiting risk), which would have proven inconsistent with the realities of capitalism and free-market enterprise.

Additionally, Grem makes some quite blustery conclusions and oversimplifications, such as mistakenly attaching meaning to the words *liberty* and *discretion*, as in theological liberty and political/antiliberalism and discrimination, respectively. Grem also contends that evangelicals adopted what he calls a “contractual theology” in their business dealings with each other. These business deals, according to Grem, were contracts made with evangelical soteriological principles in mind, reflecting Jesus Christ’s crucifixion and the payment of humanity’s spiritual debts. This kind of theological reasoning, Grem maintains, negatively influenced business dealings between evangelicals by leading them to conclude that eternal consequences would be realized in contractual business failure. Grem fails to acknowledge a commonality in principle rather than result, and instead deduces nonexistent theological-business ideological connections. Throughout his book, Grem does little to nothing to substantiate such assertions.

Grem’s study is undoubtedly heavily researched and well-written, but is certainly not without its flaws, most notably, an inability to remain objective at times. The reader will undoubtedly detect Grem’s antagonism toward these businessmen and corporations for how they led consumers to inadvertently support Christian charities, religious institutions, and causes through their economic transactions. However, what Grem fails to take into account is that evangelical consumers did also quite knowingly support faith-based causes through their economic transactions. Certainly the funding of religious and non-religious causes on all sides—conservative and liberal—is an inevitable byproduct of the American consumer and capitalist system. To be sure, almost all corporations fund or support causes in which their leadership has a vested interest, whether personal, political, emotional, spiritual, or otherwise. If Grem is displeased with the ability of certain corporations to directly or indirectly support conservative Christianity, is he also against opposing groups and causes receiving corporate funding and support? If so, the reader is left in the dark about this.

Grem however does proficiently demonstrate the historical relationship between conservative evangelicalism and corporate America. The Christian businessmen presented in this study did not hide their religious affiliation and cultural values. Rather, as Grem articulates, evangelical consumers knew with the utmost precision what they were supporting when they made purchasing decisions.

Some additional criticism of Grem is that he introduces the reader to many characters within the conservative Christian world only to fail to reintroduce them to the reader at any other point in his book. Grem allows certain individuals to drop from the focus of his study, leaving the reader with many loose ends, lacking in closure. Perhaps this weakness can be summarized best as a general lack of precision in the scope of the study.

This relationship between conservative evangelicals and big business was quite symbiotic. Conservative evangelicals received a platform, as well as both financial and social capital from corporations and businessmen who supported their religious and cultural vision for society. On the other hand, businessmen and corporations received loyal consumers, who bought into their businesses in the belief that they were also supporting evangelical causes (which in some ways, they were). Essentially, evangelicals sold goods and services

to other evangelicals, and both profited, and by and large, there was nothing underhanded or hidden about it. Using the money from big businesses, American evangelicalism forayed into the world of radio, television, and publishing; evangelical schools and universities were established; and evangelical lobbyists petitioned public figures to influence both local and national legislation.

For the cynic, Grem may have painted quite the contemptuous picture of conservative evangelical Christianity as a religious system dependent on big business donors. Grem himself admits, however, that “every successful movement requires money” (3). All movements, whether religious or otherwise, receive funding from corporations or business entities. Whether those causes seek Christianization or secularization, whether they are conservative or liberal, they all seek to advance an agenda or platform. This is where Grem arguably gives an unfair analysis, disparagement even, of the evangelical-business relationship. Conservative evangelicalism, as Grem adeptly reveals, simply has employed the business world and corporate structure to its advantage historically, and conservative evangelicals have done this better, arguably, than other groups.

Darren E. Grem’s *The Blessings of Business: How Corporations Shaped Conservative Christianity* offers a necessary glimpse into the world of conservative evangelical Christianity and the businessmen and corporations that supported its rise to religious and cultural dominance in public life. This is a helpful book for those interested in both history and religion, and is sure to be an enlightening read. However, let the reader be aware that this title receives more criticism than commendation.

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God’s Businessmen: Entrepreneurial Evangelicals in Depression and War

Sarah Ruth Hammond

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Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017 (240 pages)

For too long, historians neglected the relationship between Christianity and business in the American context. That defect has been to a significant extent remedied in recent years as a flurry of studies devoted to Christian businesspeople and various religion-oriented “markets”—metaphorical and literal—have been published. (An excellent summary of the state of this scholarship is Dana Logan’s entry, “Commerce, Consumerism, and Christianity in America,” in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia on Religion* [2017].) Sarah Ruth Hammond’s treatment of Christian businessmen in the early and mid-twentieth century is a valuable addition to this literature.

Drawing on a combination of published and archival material, Hammond traces the lives and work of a number of prominent evangelical businessmen, including R. G. LeTorneau, J. Howard Pew, and Herbert J. Taylor. In the process, she performs valuable