

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.

—Blake I. Campbell  
Marysville, Washington

## God’s Businessmen: Entrepreneurial Evangelicals in Depression and War

**Sarah Ruth Hammond**

**Darren Dochuk (Editor)**

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

institutional histories of the organizations in which such men were active, in particular the Christian Business Men's Committee International (CBMCI) and the Business Men's Evangelistic Clubs (BMEC). Hammond argues that the tendency of historians to concentrate on the role of theologians and clergy within American evangelicalism has obscured the importance of lay businessmen in shaping evangelicalism's engagement with American culture, economy, and politics. The evidence Hammond marshals here, combined with the other recent work mentioned above, makes her claim all but indisputable. Most obviously, Christian institutions often relied on Christian business leaders for financial support, and thus predictably the latter exerted influence over the former. But Hammond's account points to a wider significance: Many businessmen in this era were deeply involved in religious ministry itself, helping not only to fund but also to found, manage, and staff evangelistic enterprises. Some, indeed, saw their own businesses as explicitly religious endeavors, so that the lines between ministry and commerce were blurred.

Hammond takes both business and evangelical religion seriously and largely avoids the condescension that too often drips from the pages of historians' treatments of these subjects. She has elsewhere written that historians ought to aspire to "critical empathy" and this book is a testament to her capacity to achieve it. There are nonetheless occasional lapses, when conventional academic historical tropes are employed without an adequate argument to support them. One example is a fleeting reference to evangelical businessmen's "nostalgia for a white, hegemonic past" (86), thus casting aspersion without any significant effort to identify or substantiate the views on race held by the group in question.

Hammond pays much attention to the relationship between evangelical businessmen and the Roosevelt administration during World War II. She accurately observes that many business leaders—LeTorneau and Pew among them—who vehemently criticized big government also did very well for their businesses by cultivating government contracts. The point is a valid one and Hammond's unearthing of complaints made by the evangelical rank-and-file about the participation of Christian businesses in the production of war materiel is illuminating. Still, the charge of hypocrisy might be too readily lodged in such cases. The war effort absorbed a large portion of the US economy in the early 1940s, and it is only natural that businesses involved in war-related industries would profit as a consequence. Few conservative or even libertarian activists, let alone businesspeople, insist that government should have no budget, and defense is indeed one of the areas in which such figures usually allow a leading role for the state.

Wherever one comes down on the matters of Christian belief and market capitalism, revealing and recounting the activities of important Christian businessmen sheds more light on the relationship between the two and thus enhances our understanding of these monumental features of the American experience. In a concluding chapter, Hammond points to this larger significance and carries the story forward, observing that the achievements of "God's businessmen" in increasing the profile of conservative Christians led to the need to wrestle with "fundamental theological challenges that stemmed from evangelicals' new confidence in political and social engagement" (172).

## Reviews

This fine book, it should be noted, is a somewhat unusual production. Hammond was in the process of revising her Yale University dissertation for the University of Chicago Press when she died. One of the manuscript's reviewers, Darren Dochuk, agreed to finish the revisions and prepare the book for publication. Dr. Dochuk deserves credit for his generous contribution to ensuring that Hammond's scholarship gains the attention that it deserves.

—Kevin Schmiesing  
*Acton Institute, Grand Rapids, Michigan*