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## Book Review: Religion and the Marketplace in the United States by Jan Stievermann, Philip Goff, & Detlef Junker

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**Stievermann, Jan, Philip Goff, and Detlef Junker, eds. *Religion and the Marketplace in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. xiv + 295 pages. Paperback, \$35.00.**

*Religion and the Marketplace in the United States* is a compilation of essays concerning the correlation of religion in the United States and American economics. Observing patterns over time, the writers and editors of these essays compare megachurch structures, training and administration, to economic shifts and public data such as statistics, in order to argue their main point – religion resembles the marketplace. The thesis of this work is to examine the parallel between the capitalist economy of the United States and contemporary religions, and the book shows the ways in which American religion and American business overlap and interact with one another.

The authors take a historic look at the expansion and changes in religion in America, from the Industrial Revolution to today's era. They provide statistics of adherence to religiosity, church attendance, and the evolution of youth ministries, as well as the separation of church and state, as a direct correlation of a flourishing religion-based economy. One historic event of interest includes the Great Awakening in the 1730s and 1740s, and the influence that such a religious revitalization movement had on prominent businessmen of the day. As entrepreneurs traveled for business, the authors argued, they took on a striking evangelical aura, encouraging business associates and customers to look into spiritual matters. The authors note that religion sells well in America, and it has done so through all ages of the nation's existence. In fact, the volume offers new insights into three varieties of relationships: religion *and* the marketplace, religion *in* the marketplace, and religion *as* the marketplace.

Noticeable patterns between the two – economics and religion– may very well exist, but caution must be paid. Such speculation is noted in endnote number four of the essay entitled *Billy Graham, Christian Manliness, and the Shaping*. The endnote states that “it is hard to document something that did not happen, but it is possible at least to gain a hint of broad patterns” (p. 95). As often is the case with historical research, there is a distinct enigma or vagueness about events that happened and there are just simply gaps in the information. Speculation of events based on broad patterns to fill in those gaps presents us with an understanding that we should view cautiously.

Nonetheless, the book brings together original contributions by leading experts and rising scholars from both America and Europe. The editors themselves are professors of history and philosophy, with Stievermann specializing in the history of Christianity in the United States. Through the use of interviews, autobiographies, news reports, and psychology/sociology journals centering on the study of religion, the examination of the ways religion and markets exist in relationship can open previously unseen aspects of both. The book is well-written, or rather well-compiled, and it is best suited to those well-versed and intrigued by the topic. Ending on a more humorous note, this collection certainly gives the reader new insights into televangelists and other prosperity gospel preachers!

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