

Consensus

Volume 35
Issue 1 *Christianity and Islam in Dialogue*

Article 11

5-25-2014

No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics and the Future

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Recommended Citation

Cole-Arnal, Oscar (2014) "No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics and the Future," *Consensus*: Vol. 35: Iss. 1, Article 11.

DOI: 10.51644/ZSGC1657

Available at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol35/iss1/11>

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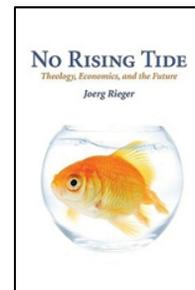
Book Review

No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics and the Future

Joerg Rieger

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009

Roughly once every year or two, I read a book that grips me and shakes my middle-class slumber and hurls me once again to join others in the struggle for Biblical justice. Joerg Rieger's *No Rising Tide* is such a work. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that it represents the kind of theology from the imperial heartland that I have been seeking for around two decades. Of course, we have seen the entry of liberation theologies into our North American theological discourse since the later 1960s, and American and Canadian authors continue to leave their mark in challenging books of their own. Here I think of numerous Afro-American, feminist, First Nations, Latino/Latina and GLBT authors who call our dominant society to account. Finally, in all fairness, we have been treated to a handful of white-male theologians who have endorsed the call to liberation from within the heart of empire.



However, I am convinced that *No Rising Tide* carries the radical message of the Jesus Movement a giant step forward. From beginning to end, the author exposes the “elephant in the room”, namely class injustice, and excoriates it like a profound Biblical prophet. Economics and class come to the fore, as they must. Otherwise the most heinous injustices will be able to be subsumed under the dominant rhetoric of “rising tide” economics and fundamentalist “free-marketism”. As a Christian theologian Rieger exposes the idolatry of the dominant imperial myths of corporate globalization with unapologetic rigor. He dares to perform an unabashed class analysis of imperial society, an absolute “no-no” in America where the myth of social mobility based on talent is such a fundamental part of the entire educational and cultural milieu. He exposes the gurus of the corporate system and ideology from Adam Smith to the “Friedmaniacs” with utmost intellectual rigor and prophetic passion. His analysis devolves on us as well, the so-called consumers and how we are manipulated along the lines of soporific desires which undermine our vocation as shalom-oriented citizens. He encourages us to dig deeply in order to perceive how our own social location defines us. As well, he takes on his own field of theology by challenging its classless and non-economic abstractions. In all of this, Dr. Rieger does not shy away from a positive use of such “unmentionable” thinker-activists as Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci.

To top it all off, I hasten to underscore that Joerg Rieger is no armchair theologian. How do I know this never having met him? Well, always I read a book's “Preface” in order to get a sense of the author's personality and what drives him/her. He joins openly and with passion the “struggle for alternatives” to free-market idolatry, and the very persons he acknowledges as his support include contributions that “each of them is doing in order to develop alternative ways of life.” Upon reading such acknowledgements it became clear to me that his scholarly sisters and brothers are activists, living and working beyond the ivory tower among the very people with whom Jesus demonstrated solidarity even to death and beyond. On the very first page of his “Preface” the author clarifies his unequivocal stance:

“Even though many contemporary economists and theologians have resigned to the belief that there is no alternative to the capitalist free-market economy, this is not the position taken in this book [We] refuse to give in to what is behind the lack of belief in alternatives: the ongoing temptation of empire. The unique stance of this book can be found in the hopeful perspective that unfolds in stark contrast with an economy which displays the traits of empire and thrives on mounting class differentials (pp. vii- viii).” Amen, brother! Thank you, Joerg Rieger for this trail-blazing study, and thank you for your living proof that the eighth-century B.C.E. prophets remain alive and well!

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