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BOOK PROFILE: *THE SLEEPING GIANT HAS AWOKEN: THE NEW POLITICS OF RELIGION IN THE UNITED STATES*, JEFFREY ROBBINS AND NEAL MAGEE, EDS.

A profile of *The Sleeping Giant Has Awoken: The New Politics of Religion in the United States* Robbins, Jeffery W. and Magee, Neal eds. New York: Continuum 2008 ISBN 978-0-8264-2969-8 paper, x+237 19.95

Books on religion and American politics have proliferated during the second Bush administration. Among the more high profile have been Chris Hedges', *American Fascists* and Randal Balmer's *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America*. Into this forest of "popular press" books comes an insightful, balanced, and theoretically sophisticated collection edited by Jeffery Robbins and Neal Magee. Instead of judging which American political party has "God" or which political party Jesus or Buddha or Muhammad would endorse, this collection examines the varied and complex functions of religion within American politics. Bookended with an introduction by John Caputo and post-face from Slavoj Zizek, the essays range widely in theological, historical, and philosophical perspective.

Given the diversity of its methodologies and approaches, this review can only engage a select number of the collection's essays, highlighting a fraction of the book's many thought provoking entries. In his opening essay, Jeff Robbins traces the importance of "radical religion" in early American history, noting the myriad of roles and relationships religious discourse assumed during the period. He calls for a return of Christianity's "prophetic critique" of society, one that could play to either conservative or liberal political investments. Similarly, Peter Heltzel's attention to "prophetic evangelicals" reminds readers, through a focus on an increasingly vocal "evangelical Left," that the "Christian Right" has neither a monopoly on prophetic utterance nor evangelical fervor. The chapter also traces the history of an evangelical progressive coalition from the 1960's through its continuing influence of the *Christian Century*.

Against the politics of security, feminist theologian Anna Mercedes employs Sarah Coakley's reworking of kenosis to advance a "politics of vulnerability." Mercedes argues that a vulnerable politics refuses to "end power that revels in our own glory alongside the demise of some others" and for acts as a "visible Christian presence that demonstrates physical hospitality to the immigration of others, and spiritual hospitality to the truth claims of others around the world" (50). Among the most insightful and original essays of the volume is Christopher Haley and Creston Davis's collaborative exploration of the moral logic of American evangelicalism. While noting the similarities between the

contemporary Christian resurgence and earlier “great awakenings,” Haley and Davis nonetheless observe how the radical Right constitutes an expansive political platform absent specific links to any biblical warrants. Contemporary Republicans may believe in tax cuts, but they are unlikely to find justifications for supply-side economics in the pages of Saint Paul. For Haley and Davis, the evangelical Right’s analysis is overly reductive in its focus on strict codes of morality. This isolates subjects from the social conditions and economic factors that shape the moral choices they must make.

The relations obtaining between theology and political theory are taken up in several essays. Ben Stahlberg considers “theocratic America” and the ways in which politicians cloak their theological intentions in claims of fulfilling the “popular will.” Stahlberg notes that religion and politics may be constitutionally separate entities, but the more complex truth is that this very separateness causes these entities to interact in multiform ways across both the electorate and its politicians. In his essay on “Sovereignty and State Form,” Rocco Gangle explores questions of representation and the relevance of classical political theory in contemporary American politics. He notes that, despite the claim of “representative government,” various scandals reveal how American politicians represent only a small fraction of constituency interests, (or maybe even the smaller interests of those on whom they can make money). Additionally, in denouncing the divine right of political rulers, some ground outside of Divine providence and authority must still be found on which to stake the political legitimacy of the state. Gangle perceptively notes that religious communities are inherently political, not because of the political platforms they create, but because of the social bonds they produce and the kind of practioners they form.

Melissa Conroy presents a difficult but rewarding essay on Lacan and the signifying subject. Outside of Zizek’s contribution, Conroy’s is perhaps the most theoretically dense in the collection, and therefore requires a rigor and knowledge of psychoanalytic theory beyond a non-specialist reader. Mary-Jane Rubenstein undertakes a careful examination of the Bush Administration understands of freedom, noting how individualistic and market-driven their operative notion of freedom is; a freedom little concerned for relationships. Neil Magee’s essay questions the very concept and possibility of an integrated theological position on politics. He notes that theological and political beliefs are too complex to hold together in a coherent system. He notes that the GOP began “microtarget” politics—the focusing on one issue such as taxes or gay marriage—to turn out that section of the electorate most deeply invested in that particular issue. Still, the myth of “integration” in political positions persists, and Magee examines how notions of integration and non-contradiction in political life are “fantasies” that prevent self-critical assessment.

In sum, editors Robbins and Magee have turned both to trusted senior scholars and younger voices to produce a thought-provoking, rich, and critically responsive exploration of religion in American politics from diverse and sophisticated points of view. The integration of theory, history, and political analysis on a wide range of issues across an equally wide range of perspectives

make this volume a valuable addition to the debate on religion's function and place in American life.

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