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Books on globalization keep readers current, raise questions

Wayne A. Holst Catholic News Service Catholic News Service | Aug. 14, 2008

GLOBALIZATION, SPIRITUALITY AND JUSTICE: NAVIGATING A PATH TO PEACE, by Daniel G. Groody. Orbis (Maryknoll, N.Y., 2007). 280 pp. $24.

"Globalization" is shorthand for "a free-market economic system operating worldwide" -- with all the implied benefits and inequities.

As the phenomenon of globalization expands in influence everywhere, Christians are improving their capacity to understand and influence these developments. They do this with enhanced spiritual and social scientific awareness and skills.

The books under consideration help us to pray responsibly, think wisely and act with integrity as we confront the world's poverty, its injustices and the need for human freedom. Both books take seriously the Christian faith and current global realities. Each links theological reflection and spiritual discernment with the worlds of politics, economics and law.

Globalization, Spirituality and Justice: Navigating a Path to Peace is by Holy Cross Fr. Daniel Groody, a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana who engages this complex subject with experience and thoroughness. *Less Than Two Dollars a Day: A Christian View of World Poverty and the Free Market* is by Kent A. Van Til, a Protestant professor of religion at Hope College in Holland, Mich. Van Til researched this book as a doctoral student at Jesuit-run Marquette University in Milwaukee.

Groody's work is spiritually mature and innovative. Van Til is thoughtful, dynamic and focused on results.

For a rich and developed exposure to the issue of globalization and justice from a contemporary Christian perspective, read both books. Their combined message will keep you current and prompt new questions.

Groody seeks to present a global reading of theology and a theological reading of globalization. "I have greatly enjoyed the benefits of globalization," he states in his preface, "but over time I began to realize that not only has it left many people behind but also it has left unanswered many important human questions."

The more the author's spirituality developed, the more social justice questions surfaced for him.

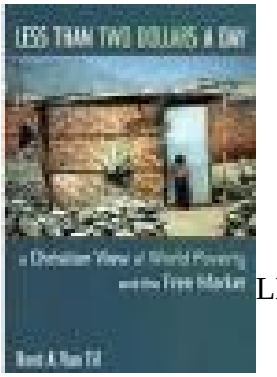
Poignant narratives begin and end each of his nine well-formed chapters. These include a presentation of the global context, foundational biblical teachings, insights from the writings of the early church fathers and Catholic social teaching over the last century.

Groody provides insights from non-Christian religions and tells the stories of five modern exemplars: Mahatma Gandhi, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day, Blessed Mother Teresa and Archbishop Oscar Romero.

Liberation theology, which emerged from Latin America during the 1960s, has since reframed itself in new ways, resulting in black, Hispanic, feminist, Asian and other liberationist interpretations. The author helpfully

revisits liberation theology and clarifies what the church supports and what it has challenged concerning this profound expression of the faith. His final chapters offer ways of integrating social justice with liturgy and various spiritualities of personal and corporate transformation.

The book does much to enlighten and to clarify many complex issues. Catholic social teaching is the church's best-kept secret, says Groody. "The church neither naively condemns the process of globalization nor uncritically embraces it."



LESS THAN TWO DOLLARS A DAY: A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF WORLD POVERTY AND THE FREE MARKET, by Kent A. Van Til. Wm. B. Eerdmans (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2007). 180 pp. $16.

For his part, Van Til writes: "I will recommend a state of affairs in which distributive justice (a fair sharing of all material resources) can actually occur. ... My goal is to affirm a theory of distributive justice in which the needs of (all the world's poor) are met."

Van Til helpfully unpacks for neophytes some basic economics. He does this with a "Calvinist bent," using significant voices from his own theological tradition, but with a desire to influence a broader audience.

While the author believes that most goods should be exchanged via a free-market system, this system cannot be assumed, by itself, to provide sustenance for all. Free-market economics must move from a posture of entitlement for a few to the needs of all.

Van Til explains why the poor don't gain from free-market distribution and why governments must influence the market with human values such as compassion.

Our concern with poverty is not an issue of generosity but of rights, he says. These rights are basic to both biblical teaching and human law and are morally applicable to all humans.

The biblical principle is that goods are to be distributed in such a way that all humans have basic sustenance or distributive justice, whereby each person is given his or her due so that all human needs are met.

The actual cost of eliminating world poverty is far lower than most people realize; perhaps 10 percent of the world's annual military budget. The problem, he concludes, is not a technical but a moral one.

Bridge-building books like these can inform and guide our best efforts.

(Holst is a writer who teaches at the University of Calgary in Alberta and at St. David's United Church in Calgary.)

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