

book, they start by outlining their general thesis and then present a number of case studies, each chapter being written by one or more of the group. Despite the number of authors and case studies the book has a surprisingly strong theme running throughout, which makes it easy to read, although sometimes this involves a modest understanding of technical economics.

It is important to point out that the authors go out of their way to stress the limitations of their work. They do not attempt to rewrite medieval history. They have relied heavily on secondary sources in English language translations and what they charmingly refer to as 'anecdotal evidence'. They are prepared to accept that their approach is wrong. Nevertheless in my judgment they have sufficient evidence to support their approach so that it would be very difficult to dismiss their work as in some way invalid.

The authors also go out of their way to stress that their work is neither an attempt to integrate economics and theology nor an attempt to discredit religious motives in human behaviour. But is this right? The claim of the book is that certain aspects of the behaviour and doctrines of the Medieval Catholic Church can be usefully analysed within a modern framework of self-interested wealth maximising economics. Their analysis is specifically concerned with the Church as an institution and not with that of individuals. Because the Church was so heavily involved in the Medieval economy as owner, investor and employer, as well as a significant buyer and seller of goods and services, it is inevitable that economic factors must have played a major part in certain decisions of the Church. The picture which emerges of the Medieval Church is of an institution well aware of economic opportunities and ready to trade and conduct business to increase its wealth.

This conclusion does not in my judgment undermine religious motives. The growth of monasteries as firms for example is compatible with responsible stewardship as well as avarice, but such a judgment cannot be made in the abstract. It can only be made in a specific context. Similarly the attempt by the Church to change marriage from a secular to a religious contract may have yielded extra income to the Church but would also be justified by a Christian view of marriage and mission. In cases therefore in which 'other worldly' motives and wealth-maximising motives point in the same direction there is certainly no inherent conflict between religion and economics and the judgment regarding which dominates in a particular case would need a great deal of extra information before making a judgment. More difficult would be those cases in which 'other worldly' interests and economic motives pointed to very different outcomes, but few are presented.

This is an interesting and important book. While it offers insights regarding the behaviour of the Church in terms of economic self-interest it says nothing illuminating about those sacrificial 'other worldly motives' which led to the formation of the Church in the first place and which have meant its worldwide growth and development ever since. The book therefore shows the power but also the enormous limitations of economics at the same time.

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*THE LAW OF THE PARISH CHURCH* by SIR WILLIAM DALE, Butterworths, 1998, 7th edition, xxv+223 pp (paperback £25) ISBN 0-406-89777-8.

The Journal has received a copy of this latest edition of Dale. It is noteworthy that the first edition was published as long ago as 1932 and that the 7th edition is the work of the original author. The 6th edition was published in 1989.

Editor.