

Robert J. Higgs, *God in the Stadium: Sports & Religion in America*, Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995; 383 pp.

Robert Higgs, professor emeritus of English at East Tennessee State University, has attempted in this book to draw upon his studies in sports and cultural history to outline the progression of thought concerning American sports. In particular he discusses what he believes to be the five stages of development: colonization, nationalization, consecration, imperialization, and commercialization. Many details concerning the attitudes of the early American Puritans and the nineteenth-century evangelical movement toward sports are especially interesting. The beginnings of the YMCA as an evangelical institution and its later modification provide a backdrop for understanding some of the present milieu.

Higgs brings together three threads of American history: sports, religion, and the military. His negative analysis of the historical development is summed up in his complaint “that to modernize Jesus is to muscularize Him and the culture of our time, and to muscularize is to militarize, as the long alliance of military drills, exercises, sports, and religion in the United States amply illustrates” (p. 333). He prefers the imagery of the staff over that of the sword, of the shepherd over that of the knight. The latter he correctly perceives dominates our culture.

While there are many insightful warnings about what is happening to our culture as illustrated in attitudes about sports, especially as it relates to religion, the fundamental or evangelical reader will be angered by Higgs’ sometimes ad hoc attacks against anyone proclaiming a born-again salvation experience. Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, and even D. L. Moody are attacked as well as many Christian sports figures like the famous college football coach Amos Alonzo Stagg. It is also surprising that in the development of these issues Charles Finney is never mentioned although he spends much time analyzing the campground revival movement of the early nineteenth century. Finally, his selectivity concerning biblical passages showing Jesus as the model shepherd shows a bias against those passages in the Bible that portray Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, as a warrior-king.