

Fred D. Gray, a black Churches of Christ minister and lawyer, became legal counsel for Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference through the 1950s and 1960s. These activities from Cassius to Gray, Robinson argues, belied “the myth of the silent church” in describing the black Churches of Christ.

The Stone-Campbell movement, starting with the Cane Ridge Revival in Kentucky in 1801, stressed adherence to the doctrine and practices of the early church. Blacks, in embracing this restorationist creed, espoused “pure worship,” which eschewed instrumental music, and “hard theology,” which emphasized Biblical literalism. These tenets constituted the Churches of Christ as the “one true church.” Despite the segregated spaces that African American churches occupied, black Churches of Christ preachers and parishioners routinely declared that neighboring Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal churches erred in their beliefs and practices. They asserted, for example, that the three modes of baptism in Methodist doctrine and the exuberant emotionalism of the Pentecostals lacked Biblical support. Robinson, in noting these contested perspectives, needed to clarify how the asymmetry of Stone-Campbell restorationism interacted with the emancipationist themes embedded in the same black religious heritage that black Churches of Christ adherents shared with other African American Christians. Did the example of Fred D. Gray, the consequential civil rights attorney, demonstrate how this paradox was reconciled?

Robinson’s study reminds scholars and students in United States religious history that black denominational diversity extends beyond the historic African American churches. Moreover, he suggests that doctrinal tensions often roiled interchurch relationships and that a limited focus on the mainline black religious bodies may mask these significant creedal disagreements. Despite scant attention paid to African and African American religious idioms and how they infiltrated black Churches of Christ belief and practice, Robinson has widened the landscape of religious influences that have affected black Christianity.

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***Birth Control Battles: How Race and Class Divided American Religion.* By Melissa J. Wilde. Oakland: University of California Press, 2020. xii + 285 pp. \$29.95 paper.**

Since the 1930s, organized religious groups in the United States have disagreed about the propriety of birth control. In *Birth Control Battles: How Race and Class Divided American Religion*, sociologist Melissa J. Wilde explores the fault lines that motivated some religious denominations to support birth control—some openly, some unofficially—and others to become fierce critics of it. Her study of 10,000 articles published in religious periodicals, sermons, census data, and the records of the American Eugenics Society reveals that anxieties about race and immigration—rather than gender and sex—and denominational support or opposition to the social gospel movement animated debates about birth control among thirty of the most prominent American religious groups between the 1930s and the 1960s.

Beginning in 1929, nine prominent American religious groups, including the Protestant Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, and Congregational Churches proclaimed that particular people had a duty to curb their fertility. To understand this support, Wilde cautions, we must consider how many religious leaders understood reproduction at the time: as a matter of the propagation of particular races and not as a referendum on women's autonomy. By the mid-1920s, nearly half of the nation's most prominent religious denominations supported white supremacist principles. Since the nineteenth century, theologians and clergy joined the ranks of politicians and eugenicists to worry aloud about the possibility of "race suicide" as waves of Italian Catholics and eastern European Jewish immigrants crowded into the nation's cities.

Racism alone did not account for religious groups' support for birth control. Since the late 1880s, social gospel adherents believed that they had a duty to transform their communities in order to combat the social ills wrought by industrial capitalism. They sought to combat poverty and injustice by supporting labor, ameliorating suffering in urban slums, and also by advocating for birth control. Social gospelers' engagement with their communities distinguished them from other denominations, whose religious expression focused on individual belief. As Wilde puts it, the distinction between social gospelers and others was "whether groups believed their primary duty as Christians was to save society or souls" (12). For many social gospelers, the ability to control reproduction was a key ingredient in the battle against poverty. For some, this also offered an opportunity to curb the fecundity of undesirable racial and ethnic groups.

Among the most interesting of Wilde's findings is the importance of geography for understanding how racism operated differently in different places and shaped support or opposition to birth control. Many northern Protestant denominations supported birth control because they worried that recent immigrants threatened to usurp their political control over local and federal government. Conversely, Southern Baptists were less likely than northern Protestant denominations to be hostile toward recent Catholic and Jewish émigrés. This absence of xenophobia reflected their particular racist ideology: many welcomed the recent influx of Europeans—whom they understood to be white—believing that they would offset the population of African Americans and other racial minorities. Because most white southerners did not fear that African Americans were poised to become more numerous or politically powerful than whites, southern religious denominations were not anxious about "race suicide," thus were critics of birth control.

Wilde's focus on denominational support and opposition to birth control offers yet another way of thinking about how at least 63,000 people in the United States came to be sterilized between the 1920s and the mid-1970s. Wilde's finding that most Southern mainline religious denominations opposed birth control appears to have had little effect on the actual practice of eugenic sterilization in many southern states. Historian Johanna Schoen's research on sterilization in North Carolina between the 1920s and 1970s reveals that the state's regressive eugenics board and progressive public health bureaucrats spearheaded efforts to coercively sterilize thousands of poor and African American women, both to curb their dependence on welfare and to prevent the "unfit" from breeding. How do we reconcile the lived reality of sterilization with Southern denominational (Southern Baptist in particular) opposition to birth control? Surely many North Carolina eugenicists, public health officials, and anti-welfare politicians were congregants in the anti-birth control denominations that Wilde studied.

This clearly written, well-organized, and cogently argued book offers new ways of studying the history of birth control politics in the United States. Wilde convinces us that in order to understand how birth control became a proxy battle over race and class in the United States, we must turn to American religious history. Other scholars might turn to Wilde's research on those denominations who supported birth control for others to investigate the converse: it stands to reason that if they wanted some (immigrants, poor people) to limit their reproduction, they wanted to promote reproduction among their own adherents. Did congregants come to understand their own responsibility to reproduction differently in response to clergy's condemnation of immigrants' fecundity? Or did early supporters' willingness to champion birth control—even if it was in service to limiting the reproduction of particular people—normalize or destigmatize contraception within congregations? Similarly, how do we make sense of Americans' relatively equitable use of contraception and abortion across religious lines? Wilde's ability to illicit these questions illustrates how invigorating this book will be for scholars of birth control, religion, and politics in the United States.

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***Spiritual Socialists: Religion and the American Left.* By Vaneesa Cook. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019. viii + 261 pp. \$49.95 cloth.**

The nineteenth-century Anglican theologian John Frederick Denison Maurice is remembered as one of the leaders of the Christian Socialist Movement in Victorian era Britain. Believing that the only true foundation for socialism was Christianity, Maurice founded cooperative societies, critiqued the capitalist system, and competed against militantly secular leftists in the wake of the 1848 revolutions. To his followers, Maurice was a spiritual leader rather than a politician. "My business," he wrote in 1852, "is not to build, but to dig, to show that economics and politics . . . must have a ground beneath themselves." His understanding of socialism was as simple as calling the church to acknowledge that it had a social mission to the poor. Light on policy details but drenched in prophetic energy, Maurice preached for "the Kingdom of Heaven . . . to renew the earth and make it a habitation for blessed spirits instead of for demons." Just don't ask him about the details.

Vaneesa Cook's new book, *Spiritual Socialists*, is a pioneering history of Maurice's spiritual progeny in America. Grouping a wide range of reform-minded Christians from World War I to the present as "spiritual socialists," Cook examines "American leftists . . . who believed that the spiritual dimensions of the human condition needed more attention" in light of the prevalent "moral dearth of Marxist politics" that dominated the Left (3). Some spiritual socialists are household names—Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Henry A. Wallace—while others come into their own through Cook's carefully constructed and well-written narrative, including missionary Sherwood Eddy, pacifist A. J. Muste, educator Myles Horton, and historian and activist Staughton Lynd. They all shared with Maurice a vision for societal transformation but also a