

## BOOK REVIEWS

John Patrick McDowell, *The Social Gospel in the South: The Woman's Home Mission Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1886-1939*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982. 167 pp.

Historians of southern religion have often stressed its preoccupation with individual salvation and apparent lack of "social concern," especially in the years before 1900. John Patrick McDowell cites the home mission movement among women in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, as significant evidence to the contrary. Although the dust jacket's claim that "these women were the means by which the Social Gospel came to Southern Methodism" overstates the case (or at least oversimplifies it), author McDowell *has* demonstrated successfully in this book his own more measured conclusion that their work "does indicate that social Christianity has played a perhaps surprisingly significant role in the religious history of the South, and also makes clear that we must consider more carefully the work and ideas of frequently overlooked groups if we are to create an accurate picture of religious trends in the South."

McDowell's study is based on the official reports and periodicals of the woman's home mission movement in the Southern Church, but he has paid particular attention to the articles, speeches, and letters of those he refers to as the "leadership group," that is, women like Lucinda and Mary Helm, Tochie MacDonell, Belle Harris Bennet, Lily Hammond, and Bertha Newell, in order to understand what these women were trying to do and why it seemed important to them. After a chapter entitled "Small Beginnings and Large Visions," the rest of the book is organized around particular areas of social concern, each an aspect of what these women saw as their central mission, that of "extending God's Kingdom on earth." There are chapters on: 1) home and work (an interesting juxtaposition, particularly if these women saw no difficulty in relating spheres usually understood as separate, in the sense of private/public; McDowell does not really pursue this), 2) immigrants and peacemaking, 3) blacks, and 4) women.

It is difficult to be critical of a work which is so obviously well intentioned and which tells a story so deserving of wider recognition. Yet some aspects of the account do not succeed as well as they might.

There are good reasons for McDowell's choice of the period 1886-1939: it begins with the establishment of the Woman's Department of Church Extension by the 1886 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and ends in 1939, when the work came under the

authority of the Woman's Division of Christian Service of The (newly formed) Methodist Church. While the problems of dealing with over half a century of home missions work are not insuperable, they are more serious and demanding of attention, given the vast social and intellectual changes encompassed by this period, than McDowell seems to acknowledge. For example, during these years the name of the woman's home mission organization changed three times, the name change sometimes acknowledging a significant enlargement of responsibility, sometimes (as in 1910) an unfortunate curtailment. With the exception of the 1910 change, McDowell does not give even a simple overview of the historical developments symbolized by these name changes; they are simply explained in a footnote (p. 12, with the names of the governing bodies of each), creating subsequent confusion for the reader.

Part of the problem may result from the author's indecision about how to combine a chronological with a topical approach. His intention is clear enough: he wants to show both the gradually expanding scope of the women's home mission activities during these fifty years and their "developing thought regarding the nature of home missions." This works well for the most part in Chapters II-V, especially in Chapter IV on "Extending the Kingdom to Blacks." It has unfortunate consequences, however, in the first chapter. (Readers who find themselves losing the story line in Chapter I should persevere; the account becomes both livelier and easier to follow in the remaining chapters.) This first chapter begins well enough by taking account of the fairly modest beginnings of home missionary work among Southern Methodist women (primarily repairing and building parsonages!). McDowell describes in very general terms the women's efforts to broaden their range of activities and the considerable opposition they encountered. The balance of the chapter examines the religious ideas which undergirded their social Christianity, but there is little or no attempt to relate the women's developing thought about home missions to the changing historical context.

These criticisms should not be understood to negate the value of this book. Parts of this story have been told before and told well, such as Virginia Shadron's account of the struggle for laity rights for women in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in her M.A. thesis at Emory University in 1976 (which McDowell cites), and later as a chapter in *Women in New Worlds* (1981). To my knowledge, there is no single study of the woman's home mission movement in Southern Methodism which has so extensively portrayed "the scope and diversity of their involvement with social reform causes." The story told here is a valuable part of the tradition of social Christianity of our entire United Methodist heritage, and it ought to be better known by the whole church, as well as by scholars of this period and region. McDowell's conclusion to the book is both an effective measure of the accomplishments of these women and a useful exploration of the factors which influenced and helped to enable their involvement.

After reading this book, one can appreciate the accolade given these women in 1921 by Will Alexander, a prominent figure in southern race relations work, who praised them as "the most progressive and constructive religious group in the South."

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Karl Steckel and Ernst C. Sommers, eds. *Geschichte der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche*. Christliches Verlagshaus GMBH, Stuttgart, 360 pp.

This book, which was approximately ten years in the making, constitutes a most thorough and comprehensive statement about the history, structure, and theological self-understanding of United Methodism within German speaking sections of Europe. Though it is the composite production of various authors their presentations are remarkably unified with a minimum of overlapping and differences in perspective. It is especially gratifying to find that all four denominational traditions, the Methodist Episcopal, the British Wesleyan Methodist, the Evangelical, and the United Brethren, which are merged in the present United Methodist Church, have received adequate recognition. Thus the account affords a well balanced picture of the founding and development of the latter.

The reader is given an insight into the tensions and problems caused by national ties and ideological differences. The tenuous existence and uncertain future of German Methodism during the days of the Third Reich are treated with great sensitivity. There are explanations for the course that was taken, especially under Bishop Melle, but no excuse for what by hindsight may appear to have been mistakes in judgment. To the open-minded reader who evaluates this account it seems remarkable indeed that during those difficult days German Methodism succeeded against great odds to keep intact its connection with world Methodism and the corresponding vision of global responsibility.

Throughout the volume the debt of German speaking Methodism to the parent church in America is emphasized. It is pointed out that the earliest Methodist missionaries to the Continent of Europe were predominantly Americans. Not only that, but along the entire course of its history Methodists in the German speaking territories of Europe were inclined to follow, at least in general outline, impulses of various kinds which had originated in an American setting. On the other hand, it is surprising to find that the debt of this branch of our denomination to German Pietism is not explicitly acknowledged. After all, the latter not only had a decided influence on the Wesleys and on the Evangelical United Brethren but on the whole theological profile of German speaking Methodism, which

always differed in various respects from that of Methodism in America. Such omissions are of minor importance, however. The whole work is lucidly written, timely, and highly informative. It should, therefore, prove to be of interest not only to the experts but to pastors and informed laity alike.

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David L. Barr and Nicholas Piediscalzi, editors, *The Bible in American Education: From Source Book to Textbook*; and Ernest R. Sandeen, editor, *The Bible and Social Reform*; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Fortress Press, and Chico, California, Scholars Press, 1982.

These volumes belong to a six-part series on the Bible in American culture published to celebrate the centennial of the Society of Biblical Literature. Together they make clear that American culture has influenced what people have looked for in the Bible as much as the Bible has influenced what people have lived and died for in America.

The first essay in *The Bible in American Education* shows that during the colonial period the Bible and education "were viewed as powerful engines for the renovation of church and society, but they were also used to justify and instill the values of the standing order." During the nineteenth century, according to the second essayist, "the history of the changing content of . . . American public school textbooks is the history of a gradual elimination of biblical material from these books." The next essay indicates that common schooling has never had full support, because it "has been unable to satisfy even one religious group without incurring another group's charge of teaching in a sectarian manner." Turning to Sunday schools, a scholar finds that as the nineteenth century unfolded, "the Sunday school's task evolved from moral indoctrination to priming students for salvation." Other chapters deal with the Bible in higher education, the contexts of Bible study today, and the Bible in public education since the 1963 *Schempp* decision.

The editor of *The Bible and Social Reform* concludes "there is little evidence" that the Bible is "an agent in effecting dramatic social change . . . independently of other cultural forces." This conclusion is drawn from examinations of how the Bible was used in: missions to Native Americans, the anti-slavery movement, the Social Gospel, the struggle for women's rights in the church, peace efforts, and black churches. In black churches "the interpretive framework is more basic than the Scriptures themselves because it alone guarantees meaning," maintains Peter J. Paris, who points to the pastoral, prophetic, reform, and nationalist traditions of interpreting the Bible in black churches.

Introductions are provided by the editors. They would be more useful if they were surveys of the Bible in American education and social reform, instead of being recapitulations of the essays.

There are, of course, the little errors that creep into every book. Readers of this journal will be amused to find Emory Stevens Bucke identified as *Buckle* on pages 78, 80, 94, and 200 of the Barr and Piediscalzi volume.

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