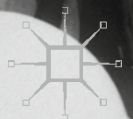


PALGRAVE STUDIES IN THE HISTORY
OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The Religious Left in Modern America

Doorkeepers of a Radical Faith

Edited by Leilah Danielson,
Marian Mollin, and Doug Rossinow



Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements

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Around the world, social movements have become legitimate, yet contested, actors in local, national and global politics and civil society, yet we still know relatively little about their longer histories and the trajectories of their development. This series seeks to promote innovative historical research on the history of social movements in the modern period since around 1750. We bring together conceptually-informed studies that analyse labour movements, new social movements and other forms of protest from early modernity to the present. We conceive of ‘social movements’ in the broadest possible sense, encompassing social formations that lie between formal organisations and mere protest events. We also offer a home for studies that systematically explore the political, social, economic and cultural conditions in which social movements can emerge. We are especially interested in transnational and global perspectives on the history of social movements, and in studies that engage critically and creatively with political, social and sociological theories in order to make historically grounded arguments about social movements. This new series seeks to offer innovative historical work on social movements, while also helping to historicise the concept of ‘social movement’. It hopes to revitalise the conversation between historians and historical sociologists in analysing what Charles Tilly has called the ‘dynamics of contention’.

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SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

Around the world, social movements have become legitimate, yet contested actors in local, national, and global politics and civil society, yet we still know relatively little about their longer histories and the trajectories of their development. Our series reacts to what can be described as a recent boom in the history of social movements. We can observe a development from the crisis of labor history in the 1980s to the boom in research on social movements in the 2000s. The rise of historical interests in the development of civil society and the role of strong civil societies as well as non-governmental organizations in stabilizing democratically constituted polities has strengthened the interest in social movements as a constituent element of civil societies.

In different parts of the world, social movements continue to have a strong influence on contemporary politics. In Latin America, trade unions, labor parties and various left-of-center civil society organizations have succeeded in supporting left-of-center governments. In Europe, peace movements, ecological movements, and alliances intent on campaigning against poverty and racial discrimination and discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation have been able to set important political agendas for decades. In other parts of the world, including Africa, India, and South East Asia, social movements have played a significant role in various forms of community building and community politics. The contemporary political relevance of social movements has undoubtedly contributed to a growing historical interest in the topic.

Contemporary historians are not only beginning to historicize these relatively recent political developments; they are also trying to relate them

to a longer history of social movements, including traditional labour organizations, such as working-class parties and trade unions. In the *longue durée*, we recognise that social movements are by no means a recent phenomenon and are not even an exclusively modern phenomenon, although we realize that the onset of modernity emanating from Europe and North America across the wider world from the eighteenth century onwards marks an important departure point for the development of civil societies and social movements.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the dominance of national history over all other forms of history writing led to a thorough nationalization of the historical sciences. Hence social movements have been examined traditionally within the framework of the nation-state. Only during the last two decades have historians begun to question the validity of such methodological nationalism and to explore the development of social movements in comparative, connective, and transnational perspective taking into account processes of transfer, reception, and adaptation. Whilst our book series does not preclude work that is still being carried out within national frameworks (for, clearly, there is a place for such studies, given the historical importance of the nation-state in history), it hopes to encourage comparative and transnational histories on social movements.

At the same time as historians have begun to research the history of those movements, a range of social theorists, from Jürgen Habermas to Pierre Bourdieu and from Slavoj Žižek to Alain Badiou as well as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to Miguel Abensour, to name but a few, have attempted to provide philosophical-cum-theoretical frameworks in which to place and contextualize the development of social movements. History has arguably been the most empirical of all the social and human sciences, but it will be necessary for historians to explore further to what extent these social theories can be helpful in guiding and framing the empirical work of the historian in making sense of the historical development of social movements. Hence the current series is also hoping to make a contribution to the ongoing dialogue between social theory and the history of social movements.

This series seeks to promote innovative historical research on the history of social movements in the modern period since around 1750. We bring together conceptually informed studies that analyse labor movements, new social movements, and other forms of protest from early modernity to the present. With this series, we seek to revive, within the

context of historiographical developments since the 1970s, a conversation between historians on the one hand and sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists on the other.

Unlike most of the concepts and theories developed by social scientists, we do not see social movements as directly linked, a priori, to processes of social and cultural change and therefore do not adhere to a view that distinguishes between old (labor) and new (middle-class) social movements. Instead, we want to establish the concept 'social movement' as a heuristic device that allows historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to investigate social and political protests in novel settings. Our aim is to historicize notions of social and political activism in order to highlight different notions of political and social protest on both left and right.

Hence, we conceive of 'social movements' in the broadest possible sense, encompassing social formations that lie between formal organizations and mere protest events. But we also include processes of social and cultural change more generally in our understanding of social movements: this goes back to nineteenth-century understandings of "social movement" as processes of social and cultural change more generally. We also offer a home for studies that systematically explore the political, social, economic, and cultural conditions in which social movements can emerge. We are especially interested in transnational and global perspectives on the history of social movements, and in studies that engage critically and creatively with political, social, and sociological theories in order to make historically grounded arguments about social movements. In short, this series seeks to offer innovative historical work on social movements, while also helping to historicize the concept of "social movement." It also hopes to revitalize the conversation between historians and historical sociologists in analysing what Charles Tilly has called the "dynamics of contention."

Leilah Danielson, Marian Mollin, and Doug Rossinow's *The Religious Left in Modern America: Doorkeepers of a Radical Faith* draws attention to the rich history of the religious left in America that influenced a whole range of social movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While, for the nineteenth century, such influence, for example over the abolition or the temperance movements, is readily acknowledged, the historiography on social movements in modern industrial twentieth-century America has little to say on religion. An ever-more secular historiography has been emphasizing the impact of secularism in twentieth-century America, which allegedly pushed religion to the margins of society. The history of religion in the twentieth century seemed on its way to becoming

a niche concern for an increasingly small group of church historians. However, from the 1990s onward the history of historiography has seen a phenomenal rise in the history of religion, and historians have been successfully questioning the central secularization thesis that guided much older research on religion.

Yet, given that history writing also takes, to a large extent, its concerns from contemporary agendas, the history of religion in America, has, for the past twenty years, been overly concerned with the religious right and right-wing religious fundamentalism that have had such an influence on American politics over recent years. While this research has yielded highly fascinating results, it also contributed to a situation where the religious left was almost hidden from sight. This volume is setting out to change this as it explores the importance of religion to a history of American progressivism in the twentieth century. If the left is associated with seeking a morally better world through more economic justice, workers' rights, racial and gender equality as well as antimilitarism, anti-imperialism, and a commitment to human rights, then Christianity contributed to all of these agendas in the twentieth century.

The chapters in this volume highlight the diversity of political, cultural, and social contexts. Around 1900 a farmer–labor movement relied on a Social Gospel that integrated questions of poverty and class into religion. Such forms of equating sin with social evils remained prominent aspects of many non-mainstream Protestant churches in America well into the inter-war period. However, strands of Catholicism and Judaism also carried distinctly left-wing agendas in the first half of the twentieth century. During the Cold War, Christianity provided a home for pacifism, the Civil Rights Movement, antiracism and left-wing internationalism as well as anticapitalism. Sections of the Black Power movement and sections of radical feminism were deeply influenced by Christian ideas. Overall, this volume underlines how vital it is for modern scholars of social movements to integrate the study of religion into their concerns for a whole variety of very diverse social movements and we hope that this volume is successful in encouraging this trend within a wider literature on social movements.

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The editors found the process of writing and pulling together this volume both intellectually and personally fulfilling. It was a genuinely collaborative project for which we would like to acknowledge each other, as well as our contributors, whose essays together provide a deeply textured and vivid portrait of the religious left tradition. We would also like to thank our editor at Palgrave Macmillan, Molly Beck, whose support has been critical to this project's success.

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Introduction

Leilah Danielson, Marian Mollin, and Doug Rossinow

*For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in
the house of my God
than live in the tents of wickedness.
Psalm 84: 4–10*

The first year of Donald Trump’s presidency, 2017, may be recalled as, among other things, the moment when the religious left burst on the American political scene. A spate of news articles at this time heralded the appearance of faith-based progressive activism, following “40 years”—as one major account put it—“in which the Christian right has dominated the influence of organized religion on American politics.”¹ Observant

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Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, Jews, and others became newly vocal, or just newly heard, in their defiance of a conservative government and in their advocacy for a contemporary agenda of social democratic inclusion that many atheists might embrace. Diverse in terms of gender, race, and sexual identity, this political force appeared to many as a refreshingly new component in both the political left and American civic religion. The religious left might have historical antecedents, but these seemed obscure and weak, at least in recent times. The Rev. Jennifer Butler told a journalist with chagrin that, among religious folk, in her memory, “Those of us who were more social-justice oriented, we became embarrassed to speak to our faith and values publicly.”² She was glad that this seemed to be changing.

With such testimony on offer, many readers may have no idea that the religious left has had a rich and continuous history in the United States, although surely a history with its ups and downs. The notion that a religious left is alien to contemporary America is curiously ingrained. In part, this has to do with established assumptions about the secularization of modern American society. Although recent scholarship in U.S. religious history has come to highlight the myriad ways in which politics and religion have shaped one another up to the very present, the history of the left’s intersection with religious impulses remains largely untold.³ As far as progressive activism in the American past is concerned, textbook treatments of U.S. history routinely attribute religious inspiration to movements for reform and radical change in nineteenth-century America, from abolitionism and temperance to prison reform and women’s rights. Regarding later incarnations of radical activism, however, religion often appears as what Jon Butler, the dean of American religious historiography, memorably terms a “Jack-in-the-Box,” popping up surprisingly now and again.⁴ The reality is that the nexus of faith and social change was not totally eclipsed with the dawning of a more urban, diverse, and modern society. Matthew Sutton and Darren Dochuk correctly call the United States “one of the most religiously charged political cultures in the modern West”; this description held true throughout the twentieth century, and the political left was not sealed off from this truism of American civic life.⁵

This volume presents the all-too-often missing history of the religious left tradition in the industrial-era United States.⁶ It does so not with a single voice and a seamless narrative, but through a series of studies and stories from multiple places, times, and points of view. While we see a religious left tradition in modern America, we make no effort to downplay its tremendous heterogeneity, its diversity in terms of confessional tradition,

race and ethnicity, gender and sexual identity, social class, theology, and political doctrine. Both the cohesion and the complexity of this tradition are real to us.

Common threads emerge from diverse religious and political strands: themes of transformation, moral politics, and personal courage and fortitude have historically united people of faith on the left. From numerous vantage points, religious radicals looked at American society and concluded that it had to be reordered if they hoped to establish a world of justice, equality, and peace—spiritual and humanitarian goals that they all shared. All took from their faiths the personal strength they needed to choose the role of doorkeeper to a holy and righteous space—in the words of the Psalmist—instead of dwelling in an abode whose comforts were rooted in immorality. They burned with a desire to infuse American civic life with a vision of a better world and with the courage to make simple yet transcendent questions of morality urgent public matters.

This history is reflected in the ongoing activism of today, in formations such as Sojourners, the evangelical Protestant radical outfit long headed by the Rev. Jim Wallis, Jewish Voice for Peace, a national organization that seeks a peaceful solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict from a left perspective, and the “Moral Mondays” campaign led and organized by the Rev. William J. Barber in protest of North Carolina’s legislative shift to the right. As Barber himself puts it, “We use the words that progressives have thrown away—morality, welfare, poor, faith—because those are soul words.”⁷ Surely some atheists talk in such terms of plain morality as well. Yet people of faith may have a distinctive claim to such “soul words,” guarding them and speaking them when others falter. We hope that believers and atheists, academics and activists, the doubtful and the committed, will read the essays collected here and know that this history is deep, wide, and still flowing onward. This is everyone’s history.

Making sense of this history requires starting with some definitions and some context. When we use the term “political left,” we are referring to a multi-pronged and evolving set of organizations and movements with shared commitments to a range of concerns, including struggles for economic justice, workers’ rights, racial equality, antimilitarism, anti-imperialism, and human rights. More basically, this work coheres around an idea of the left as a politics committed to reconstructing society in order to achieve social and political *equality*, *liberation* from oppressive traditions, and a new social *unity* that may overcome the divisions of modern capitalist life. These values of equality, liberation, and unity were

not shared with equal intensity by all of those on the left during the period the essays in this collection cover. Activists in the religious left, for example, tended to place higher value on unity than did their atheist counterparts, while many faith-based radicals harbored reservations about some of the demands for cultural liberation that secular radicals espoused. Their goals, however, formed a matrix of vision that leftists in general held in common.

These goals also gave left activists a distinct position on the spectrum of political practice and debate. Leftists stood in sharp opposition to the agendas of the political right, which focused on individual freedoms within a framework of cultural traditionalism and capitalist economics. Their relationship to political liberalism was more complex. Leftists and moderate reformers sometimes shared social ideals and critiques, and could collaborate when their goals aligned. But because liberals saw more of value in existing social institutions and patterns than did their leftist contemporaries, the liberal desire to reform rather than fundamentally transform society often placed the two groups at odds. Religious radicals thus carved out a distinctive, if heterogeneous, political identity across the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one that acquired a coherent shape and content through the shifting challenges and different phases of that radical lineage's emergence.

The history of the modern American religious left can be divided into three phases of political development—rise, crisis, and revival—each featuring different political departures and distinct theological emphases. While the initiatives of these eras overlapped and emerged unevenly, to think in terms of a three-stage sequence clarifies and describes the larger arc of the religious left's development.

In the first phase, a long era stretching roughly from 1880 to the 1930s, reformers built a powerful concept of social Christianity into the foundation for a wide range of political action, some of it quite radical. The Social Gospel of this era held that sin was social as well as individual, and that salvation depended upon constructing a more just and united society. It combined a liberal theology of a God who was loving, benevolent, and “immanent” (i.e., present and emerging in Creation) with evangelical commitments to rebirth and proselytizing, and it manifested itself in a variety of forms. The Baptist Walter Rauschenbusch took Social Gospel theology in a leftist, anti-capitalist direction in the early twentieth century, and militant pacifists of the World War I era debuted a personal commitment to action against war—and sometimes against imperialism and racism as well.

Radical thinkers like Sherwood Eddy, A. J. Muste, and Howard Thurman embraced a vision of Christian social reconstruction and redemption. Despite their radicalism, however, such leftist thinkers remained rooted in the theology, and sometimes the institutions, of the liberal Protestant mainline churches. Catholics began to adopt a Social Gospel of their own, drawing on Catholic teachings that condemned the abuses of capitalism and calling on the Church to support working-class organization. The central figure in the new Catholic left was Dorothy Day, also a fierce opponent of war, who maintained that the real measure of social progress was the realization of human personhood.

The second phase of the religious left's history lasted from the late 1930s until about 1960. This was an era of crisis, repression, and rethinking for radicals who had become strongly drawn to pacifism and socialism. The war against fascism and then the Cold War against communism rocked the world of religious radicalism, reducing leftist ranks and marginalizing leftist believers. During World War II and after, Christian realists, led by the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, chastised Social Gospel adherents in general for failing to reckon with human sinfulness and the will to power, and called for compromise with the coercion and violence that characterized actual relations between social classes and nation-states. At the same time, the red scare of the 1940s and 1950s pushed Christian leftists, who were neither communists nor anticommunists, into a political and institutional netherworld, where they responded with a new countercultural identity and a politics of prophetic witness against atomic weapons, the warfare state, and white supremacy. Muste, like Day, now drew upon post-liberal currents of personalism and existentialism to insist that human time was open to messianic time and that suffering and witness by a small minority could help usher an ungodly empire into the Kingdom of God. By the mid-1950s, Martin Luther King, Jr. had begun to synthesize liberal and post-liberal theologies as he helped lead the African American movement against U.S. apartheid and put into practice the vision of redemptive, prophetic action against injustice and for a new social unity.

The third phase of this history saw a revival of the religious left in America between 1960 and 1990, an era of liberation theologies and new social movements "from below." The African-American freedom movement stood at the leading edge of this religious left, as it did for the U.S. left as a whole during this time. It was joined in the 1960s by a new mobilization against war and empire sparked by the American war in Vietnam. The struggles against racial injustice and violent imperial domination rele-

gitimized the religious left, whose dramatic expansion in the 1960s and 1970s persisted even into the more politically conservative period that followed. Religious African-American, Latino/a, women, and gay activists forced members of dominant groups to recognize them and their perspectives in a broad, multi-sided push for a reworked society that would transcend the forms of oppression that these groups experienced. Religious leftists embraced two different kinds of liberation during this era: the Catholic, Marxist-influenced “theology of liberation,” emanating from Latin America, which demanded a new society oriented around the needs of, and partly led by, the poor; and liberation from old attitudes about fixed and hierarchical identities, identities to which more conservative religious people were often profoundly committed. Activists of non-Christian faiths increasingly linked their own religious beliefs to left politics, although in small numbers, as the nation’s religious diversity grew. In the more conservative climate of the 1980s and 1990s, religious radicals and liberals once again worked together in reform and protest activities and within seminaries. The Social Gospel generation’s concerns with economic exploitation and labor rights gained new salience, as global economic changes and neoliberal state policies intensified old-but-new forms of inequality and division.

Despite this rich history, and despite the fact that recent scholarship in modern U.S. history has come to highlight the myriad ways in which politics and religion repeatedly shaped one another, the literature on the history of the religious left has been largely eclipsed by studies that emphasize right and center political sectors. The largest and most visible dimension of this scholarship relates to the rise of the evangelical Protestant right,⁸ reflecting that movement’s ascendancy within contemporary American politics and culture. Nevertheless, one does not have to look far to uncover studies that complicate this dominant narrative. Research on the intersections between Catholicism and politics, for example, makes it clear that the push towards Christian political conservatism was not the sole domain of Protestant evangelicals.⁹ Going beyond the world of the right, a range of new studies emphasize the role mainline denominations and religious doctrines played in shaping the currents of twentieth-century American liberalism.¹⁰ When it comes to discussions of the history of the modern American left, however, religion and religious faith are often hard to find.

Indeed, the literature on radicalism and left activism from the late nineteenth century onward, and especially writings that emphasize the decades that followed World War II, are primarily secular—if not atheist—in focus.

We use the loaded term “atheist” in its literal meaning—not to denote a definite and essential belief in the nonexistence of God, but rather to represent politics and people who are *a-theist*: whose activities and passions bracket the questions of God, faith, and transcendence as irrelevant, at least as far as politics is concerned. This decidedly irreligious framework dominates the vast collection of monographs that chronicle the history of the American left as well the best and most recent synthetic narratives, bolstering the established tropes of a Christian right and a secular left.¹¹

Where religion does appear in historical accounts of progressive politics, it remains marginalized and fragmented. Historians of peace and anti-war movements, for example, regularly highlight the workings of religious faith among radical pacifists and antimilitarists, but generally fall short by restricting their interpretive claims to the history of overtly religious groups or campaigns. In this way, even scholars who understand the importance of religion to political radicalism and the presence of leftists among people of faith ultimately reinforce a perception of the religious left as segregated from the “mainline” of modern American radicalism.¹² At the same time, confessional and racial lines of division truncate many accounts of religious radicalism, and thus challenge our ability to analyze how the intersections between religion and left activism operated as a whole. Historians of Catholic radicalism write about a Catholic world; those who study Protestant leftists describe a Protestant dominion.¹³ Scholars, similarly, treat religion’s role within the black freedom struggle as *sui generis*, reflective of the distinctive qualities of a particular movement in which clergy and the black church played central roles, but not necessarily indicative of broader trends.¹⁴ The task of integrating these individual stories into the collective narrative of left politics in the United States remains undone.

Equally worrisome is the tendency among some historians of the left to categorize religion and religious activism as manifestations of emotion and superstition among marginalized social groups rather than the foundation of a rational and forward-looking strategy of resistance to prevailing structures of oppression. To be sure, rarely, if ever, will one find in today’s scholarship an explicit statement that religion is merely a consolation of the downtrodden and a figment of the backward mind, only to be indulged by those with more mature and modern perspectives. Yet the echoes of such attitudes implicitly linger in the dominant narratives.

Similarly, while early works on the history of the black freedom struggle, specifically in the post-1954 era, gave pride of place to Christian

nonviolence, the salience of religion has receded dramatically even in contemporary scholarship on the “long civil rights movement.” Instead, recent scholarship on this topic embraces a new materialism that assigns religion, in the tradition of the great sociologist E. Franklin Frazier and others, to the status of an impediment to progress, as something to be overcome.¹⁵ Studies of labor and working-class history, which tend to follow a more explicitly Marxian frame, have long given religion short shrift. Although new research has begun to address issues of religious belief and practice, particularly with regard to Southern struggles for social and economic justice, as well as César Chávez’s efforts within the United Farm Workers,¹⁶ such efforts are few and far between, and essentially serve as an annex to decidedly secular treatments of union organizing in the industrial North. As a result, civil rights and labor activists motivated by spiritual faith appear as exceptions that prove the rule, anomalous examples of religious radicals who add flavor to the story of the American left but do not challenge our basic understanding of that tradition.

This collection of new essays draws from an emerging wave of scholarship on American social movements that forcefully underscores the close historical relationship between religion and ostensibly nonreligious forms of progressive, left, and radical politics. The 13 essays highlight the major developments and themes in the history of the religious left from the 1870s through the 1980s. We do not provide an overview of contemporary religious radicalism; readers will not find accounts of present-day social movements for LGBTQ rights,¹⁷ progressive Islam, or opposition to Donald Trump’s presidency. Instead, we take a decidedly historical approach, focusing on significant social formations that occurred during a time when the overwhelming majority of Americans came from Christian backgrounds, with concerns that reflected their particular historical and cultural contexts. Of course, Christians are a highly differentiated group with varied belief systems and agendas, a reality that is highlighted in the essays collected here. They also were not the only Americans who engaged in faith-based activism, as the chapters on Jewish radicalism reveal. Still, even as we have tried to capture the depth and complexity of Judeo-Christian radicalism, our account is not exhaustive. It is not meant to be. What this collection provides, instead, is a kaleidoscopic look at various dimensions of the religious left’s history, and a preview of new directions in scholarly treatments of these political movements and endeavors.

The early chapters map routes of intersection between religion and radicalism among major religious groups between 1870 and 1945. Chapter 2,

by Janine Giordano Drake, traces the emergence of a self-conscious religious left from the farmer-labor movements of the late nineteenth century through the 1910s. The proliferation of “working-class Christianities,” she argues, threatened the cultural authority of middle-class clergy, who in turn created a Social Gospel that absorbed much of their critique, but also tamed and harnessed it to their agenda of ministerial leadership. Chapter 3, by Christopher Evans, picks up Drake’s thread and argues that the Social Gospel did not collapse with World War I, but entered a new and dynamic phase. By focusing on radical clergy like Sherwood Eddy and his work with the Young Men’s Christian Association, Evans shows that the Christian left worked in networks and organizations outside of the mainline churches, where they inspired a new generation of youth to work on behalf of civil rights and peace. Chapter 4, by David Verbeeten, turns our attention from the predominantly Protestant narrative of religious radicalism to a thoughtful exploration of the overrepresentation of Jews in left-wing politics through the career of Communist leader Alexander Bittelman. Ostensibly secular and assimilationist, Bittelman’s Jewish radicalism reflected Judaic values and theological tropes, and served to affirm difference and resist embourgeoisement. The Catholic radical Dorothy Day similarly fused her left-wing politics and religious faith, as Nicholas Rademacher shows in Chap. 5. Combining Catholic social thought and anarchist philosophy, Day enacted a politics of personalism that stood as a challenge to liberal religion and the liberal state.

Another cluster of chapters explores religious left interventions into pressing questions of global power and racial hierarchy in the era of the Cold War. Chapter 6, by Leilah Danielson, argues that religion was an important factor in the midcentury shift from an “Old Left” to a “New Left.” Against the backdrop of America’s rise to the status of global superpower and the onset of the Cold War, the venerable radical A. J. Muste posited a “true church” of pacifists and nonconformists whose prophetic action would break through the alienation and oppression of organized society and Cold War power politics and make the beloved community possible. Chapter 7, by Sarah Azaransky, explores the internationalist roots of radical black Christianity through the activism of Howard Thurman, Pauli Murray, and Bayard Rustin. By highlighting how black intellectuals and theologians looked outside of the United States, and even outside of their religious traditions, in search of ideas and practices that could transform American democracy, Azaransky’s essay forcefully places the U.S. civil rights movement within the context of a global wave of anticolonial struggle. Staying

closer to home, Douglas Thompson's examination of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Chap. 8, illuminates King's commitment to specific ideas about what it meant for the nation to live up to the ideals of a Christian America. As Thompson argues, these religious beliefs fundamentally shaped King's engagement with the state as he resisted the politics of racial injustice and inequality. Chapter 9, by Felipe Hinojosa, shows how antiracist Catholic clergy and laity in Davenport, Iowa, created a space where the profoundly marginalized community of Mexican Americans could organize and mobilize an interethnic coalition to fight for civil rights. As Hinojosa points out, these coalitions persisted, with faith-based groups serving as the center of the 1980s Sanctuary movement and the contemporary movement for immigrant rights.

Further chapters demonstrate the centrality of religion in the identity politics of the late 1960s and 1970s. Chapter 10, by Angela Dillard, challenges the secular bias in the historiography of the Black Power movement by revisiting James Forman's "Black Manifesto" and highlighting the involvement of African-American Christians. In so doing, she demonstrates the complexity of the movement's engagement with Christianity, and argues that one of its greatest legacies was black liberation theology. Lilian Calles Barger makes a similar argument about radical feminism in Chap. 11. In contrast to the secular narrative of the feminist movement, Barger shows that religion was deeply meaningful and relevant to many radical feminists who deconstructed its patriarchal foundations and invented a theology and practice of women's liberation. Chapter 12, by Doug Rossinow, examines the rise of Jewish identity politics in the late 1960s and the attempt to build the first intentionally religious Jewish left in U.S. history. Arthur Waskow, a central figure in this effort, found that this project became problematic in the context of a global left that increasingly identified Israel with imperialism and oppression toward the Palestinians.

If the religious left turned inward during the 1960s and embraced a politics of culture and difference, it was also transnational and global, as demonstrated by the remaining essays. In Chap. 13, Marian Mollin explores the intersection of spiritual and political praxis in the life of Maryknoll Sister Ita Ford, one of four North American churchwomen murdered by the El Salvadoran military in late 1980. Ford's activism grew out the Sixties zeitgeist and Vatican II, and evolved further under the influence of liberation theology in Latin America. Chapter 7, by David R. Swartz, further explores the transnational and mutually constitutive

culture and politics of the modern left by showing how evangelical immigrants pushed their conservative American coreligionists toward progressive stances on poverty, neocolonialism, and immigration. These stances led to alliances with other religious radicals and the secular left, but evangelical traditionalist theology and views on marriage and sexuality reveal continuing points of tension and rupture on the left. Whether or not the left chooses to accommodate this diversity, ultimately it will have to reckon with the dense and expansive religious networks that span the United States and the world.

Our outline of religious left history clearly shows that, over the course of the long twentieth century, faith served as a touchstone for followers of the religious left tradition, an inspiration during times that seemed, to them, both good and bad. Religious faith was a life raft they could hold onto through the darkest of eras, a source of hope that, despite the circumstances surrounding them, allowed them to believe their work would usher in a better day. During more optimistic periods, when believers thought they saw that new day dawning, religion remained a “true north” that might keep them on a moral path while pointing them toward society’s destination. Inspired by a sense of prophetic witness as well as a hunger for justice in the here and now, this diverse array of activists drew from the influences of mainstream culture and secular left activism even as they charted new directions of protest and new visions of what the world could become.

Despite their differences, the various incarnations of the modern American religious left shared important commonalities that shaped their distinctive style of activism and influenced the broader culture of American radicalism. Individuals, groups, and organizations within the religious left often served as important sites of organizing and resistance that transcended the faith-based communities they grew out of to include their secular allies on the left. These groups, however, were more than simply “movement halfway houses” that provided critical training and support for existing and growing mass movements.¹⁸ Faith in a transcendent power greater than humankind, and belief in the scriptures that this power inspired, could push activists to engage in activities and take risks that sometimes went beyond the imagination of their secular counterparts and which challenged prevailing paradigms of political protest. This perspective allowed members of the religious left to embrace an alternative definition of effectiveness that moved beyond a sole reliance on worldly rationality and logic to promote new ways of thinking and acting. Their

organizing frameworks unabashedly celebrated idealistic and utopian goals, advanced new and prefigurative ways of envisioning social relations, and modeled innovative strategies and tactics, all of which they carried with them as they worked within larger movements for social and political change. Because of their influence, the secular left itself came to reflect the religious cultures and spiritual tropes that its faith-based members and allies brought into their shared struggles for a more just, compassionate, and egalitarian world.

The relationship between the religious and nonreligious left ran in multiple directions. Participation in left activism profoundly shaped how people understood their spiritual beliefs and put them into practice. Many saw radical politics as an embodiment of their “lived religion” and a means by which to actualize their faith. And as they developed critiques of the institutions of power that defined society at large, their relationship with religious structures of power also changed. Some discovered that their activism led them to question, even defy, what they decried as “institutional” or “bourgeois” religion. Others found that their involvement in left activism led them to develop and adopt radical new theologies rooted in their commitments to social justice and liberation.

Just as important, despite the fact that members of the religious left often framed their efforts in terms of prophetic witness and judgment, and although they may have considered themselves estranged from, and certainly critical of, the mainstream of American life, their faiths insured they were never completely cut off from the heart of American culture. Their prophecy did not come entirely from an outsider stance. Even as they called for sweeping societal shifts, they also maintained essential links to some of the fundamental cultural norms and practices of the world they hoped to change. Some on the left might view this cultural groundedness as a factor that compromised the radicalism of these religious believers. In fact, the deep ties of faithful radicals to broadly shared religious and cultural traditions furnished them with a vital source of authority and legitimacy, and preserved paths of communication and even communion with other Americans.

The American religious left did not hold any monopolies on idealism, transcendent hope, or creative strategies and tactics for radical protest and resistance. Nor did the fact that faith spurred members of the religious left into action make them more dedicated or successful than their secular counterparts as they worked to foment fundamental social and political change. Nevertheless, the essays in this volume remind us that visions of

utopian radicalism and prefigurative politics came from a range of sources: sacred and secular, spiritual and corporeal, mortal and transcendent. Neither the history of American religion nor that of the American left is even close to complete without knowledge of their ideas, their feelings, and their acts.

NOTES

1. Laurie Goodstein, “Religious Liberals Sat Out of Politics for 40 Years. Now They Want in the Game,” *New York Times*, June 10, 2017. Other important accounts were: Scott Malone, “‘Religious left’ emerging as U.S. political force in Trump era,” *Reuters*, March 27, 2017; Julie Zauzmer, “People are looking for a ‘Religious Left.’ This little-known network of clergy has been organizing it,” *Washington Post*, April 26, 2017; and Holly Meyer, “You know the religious right. Here’s the religious left (and it’s fired up),” *USA Today Network*, April 15, 2017.
2. Laurie Goodstein, “What a Leader of the Religious Left Admires about the Religious Right,” *New York Times*, June 12, 2017.
3. For a sampling of the newest and most exciting research in this area, see: Matthew Avery Sutton and Darren Dochuk, eds., *Faith in the New Millennium: The Future of Religion and American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Andrew Preston, Bruce J. Schulman, and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Faithful Republic: Religion and Politics in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); and R. Marie Griffith and Melani McAlister, eds., *Religion and Politics in the Contemporary United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).
4. Jon Butler, “Jack-in-the-Box Faith: The Religion Problem in Modern American History,” *Journal of American History* 90, no. 4 (March 2004): 1357–78. Butler was describing the role of religion overall in narratives of modern America.
5. Sutton and Dochuk, *Faith in the New Millennium*, 2.
6. Too often missing, but not completely. The major efforts at synthetic narratives of the American religious left are Robert H. Craig, *Religion and Radical Politics: An Alternative Christian Tradition in the United States* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1992) and Dan McKanan, *Prophetic Encounters: Religion and the American Radical Tradition* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2011).
7. Goodstein, “Religious Liberals Sat Out.”
8. On the history of the America religious right, see: Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution*

- (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Steven P. Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2010); Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in Modern Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014); Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014); Seth Dowland, *Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); and Neil J. Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).
9. For examples of recent scholarship on the history of Catholic conservatism, see: Stacie Taranto, *Kitchen Table Politics: Conservative Women and Family Values in New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); and Todd Scribner, *A Partisan Church: American Catholicism and the Rise of Neoconservative Catholics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015).
 10. On Protestantism's influence on modern American liberalism, see: David Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013). See also: Mark A. Lempke, *My Brother's Keeper: George McGovern and Progressive Christianity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017); Cara Lea Burnidge, *A Peaceful Conquest: Woodrow Wilson, Religion, and the New World Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Michael G. Thompson, *For God and Globe: Christian Internationalism in the United States Between the Great War and the Cold War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2015); Elisha J. Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Matthew S. Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
 11. Here we refer to two otherwise outstanding syntheses: Michael Kazin, *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011); and Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps, *Radicals in America: The U.S. Left since the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Among the many monographs that detail the histories of Communist and Marxist-inspired leftist movements in the modern United States, almost all narrate the course of the atheist left. Noteworthy examples include: Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The*

- American Communist Party: A Critical History, 1919–1957* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1957); Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism in the United States: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed Books, 1984); Fraser M. Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997); Christopher Phelps, *Young Sidney Hook: Marxist and Pragmatist* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); James R. Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Communism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Kate Weigand, *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialism in New York* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); and Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: A History of the American Left* (London: Verso, 2013).
12. For strong treatments of the religious left that present this history more as an essential part of the American *religious* tradition rather than as a revision of our familiar pictures of *both* religion and radicalism in the United States, see McKanan, *Prophetic Encounters and* Craig, *Religion and Radical Politics*. For peace historians' attention to faith-based activism, see: Patricia McNeal, *Harder than War: Catholic Peacemaking in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Rachel Waltner Goossen, *Women Against the Good War: Conscientious Objection and Gender on the American Home Front, 1941–1947* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Convictions of the Soul: Religion, Culture, and Agency in the Central America Solidarity Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Roger Peace, *A Call to Conscience: The Anti-Contra War Campaign* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012); Rosalie Riegle, *Crossing the Line: Nonviolent Resisters Speak Out for Peace* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013); Melissa Klapper, *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace: American Jewish Women's Activism, 1890–1940* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); and Allan Austin, *Quaker Brotherhood: Interracial Activism and the American Friends Service Committee* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).
 13. For examples of the history of the Protestant left, see: Mark Hulsether, *Building a Protestant Left: Christianity and Crisis Magazine, 1941–1993* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999); Kip Kosek, *Acts of Conscience: Christian Nonviolence and Modern American Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Patricia Applebaum, *Kingdom to*