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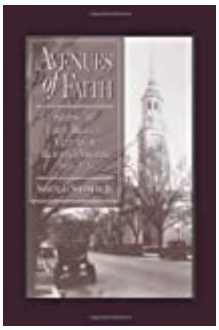

Samuel C. Shepherd, Jr. *Avenues of Faith: Shaping the Urban Religious Culture of Richmond, Virginia, 1900-1929.* Religion and American Culture. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001. xii + 4l4 pp. $54.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8173-1076-9.

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Interdenominational Progressivism

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In really good survey histories, such as *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, by C. Vann Woodward and *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* by George B. Tindall, every paragraph, sometimes every line, contains at least one allusion that cries out for the author to stop and explicate. But the nature of the beast is that the authors cannot stop and tell every story. Rather they race on, trying to get through the masses of material that make their surveys so dominating. On a smaller scale, Shepherd has the survey blues too. In this excellent survey, there is too much to say, too many stories to tell, and too little space to tell them.

There is a dearth of good local studies of Southern urban religion, and Shepherd's effort shows why. The task is daunting, almost impossible in any reasonable number of pages. A manageable history generally has to be an institutional history of a single church or a denomination. Sociological studies such as 1997's *Contemporary American Religion; An Ethnographic Reader* edited by Penny Edgell Becker and Nancy L. Eiesland, shift emphasis from the institutions, and examine neglected subgroups of people, but they can only cover small populations over short time spans. Shepherd is bold enough to take on the whole city. Even then he dares not tackle the whole two hundred and fifty years of Richmond's history or the full range of denominations, much less the full range of experiences. He examines only six denominations. Although Richmond had Greek Orthodox, Catholics, Unitarians, Quakers, and the full gamut of African-American churches, some of which were numerically larger than the six, the dominant force in Richmond's religious life was the variegated Southern Protestantism of the Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Church of Christ, and Lutherans.

Shepherd sets the context with a broad chapter that describes Richmond during the period. After thirty years or so of looking back to the Civil War, Richmond took off at the turn of the century. Doubling in population, expanding from about five square miles to nearly twenty-five, booming economically, working all the good southern progressive issues–public health, education, prohibition. And increasingly Jim Crow. This section is a bit disjointed–too many discrete facts over too great a pe-

riod of time with too much going on and too little space to put it into tidy little bundles and caress them with context and pithy analysis.

As the city grew, so did the churches. They grew in size of membership, ornateness of the physical plant and missions. Church members moved away and neighborhoods changed. Within the church buildings, music switched from soloist or quartet to massed robed choir and elaborate pipe organ, with some degree of competition for the biggest and the best. Technology changed the church, with some churches running their own radio stations in the 1920s. Given that the dominant churches were good old-fashioned Protestants, evangelism was strong. There was a significant amount of interdenominationalism, which is somewhat difficult, the swapping of pulpits, the joint services and all, given the differing doctrines. And revivals were sometimes citywide, if racially segregated. Shepherd, by the way, summarizes the various doctrines succinctly and clearly. But the working together across denominational lines for religious and progressive causes is the key that sometimes gets lost in the single-church, single-denomination studies that crowd the field.

Churches professionalized too, another good progressive characteristic. Shepherd notes the rising educational requirements, the increasing professionalization, the increasing roles of women in Sunday school teaching and administration and in other administrative areas, the hiring of support staff and assistant ministers. Churches set up their own educational institutions from kindergarten to boarding school, and the Baptists upgraded Richmond College (University of Richmond as of 1920), dipped into coeducation via the coordinate college (Richmond had a women's college, Westhampton, on its campus). Union Theological Seminary was a dominant source of Presbyterian ministers in the South. And Presbyterians established the General Assembly School for Layworkers for men and women alike. *Avenues of Faith* is still the traditional institutional history. But it crosses denominational lines as a good idea comes to various churches at more or less the same time. This is a thirty year period with chronology lost in the topical approach.

Progressive failures appear in the chapter entitled, "Not Brothers or Sisters." Relationships with other faiths were very limited, including Richmond's Jews, who at 8,000 outnumbered Presbyterians, Disciples or Lutherans. What success there was came from Rabbi Edward N. Calisch, a good progressive who accommodated to the extent of starting Sunday services for Jews who didn't want to lose Saturday business to Protestants. Notably, Jews and Baptists united on occasions when the other Protestants wanted to Christianize the public arena. But Richmond also had people who regarded the Jew as Shylock and Christ-killer. Even those who worked with Jews didn't socialize with them.

Richmond's one hundred Mormons were pariahs even more because of their polygamy, intermix of church and state, political influence, and aggressive conversion of the naive. Catholics weren't much more acceptable, not members of the ministerial alliance, and maybe immigrants. To generous Baptists, immigrant Catholics were fertile ground for Baptist prosyletization; to the less generous nativists, they were defectives. At best, Protestant-Catholic relations were tenuous.

As to African Americans, that would have asked too much. Black Baptist numbers were as great as the white ones, and there wasn't enough energy for a reform effort of that size. The Presbyterians had their mission, but mostly the white churches helped whites and left black churches to minister to blacks. With infrequent exceptions, white religious leaders accepted the increase in Jim Crow, but many at least drew the line at violence, speaking out against the KKK and Anglo-Saxon Clubs of America. White Protestant Richmond churches stood against violence but didn't ameliorate conditions for those not of the faith.

Shepherd also talks of fundamentalism, and war, and missions, home and overseas. He talks of politics in the anti-saloon league, showing the fine line the Baptists and Presbyterians sometimes had to draw when they entered the world. Reform was okay as was issue advocacy, but endorsing candidates or demanding specific positions on issues was not; on the other hand, the churches had no qualms about censoring movies, defining themselves as moral arbiters. They split over prayer in school though, with the Baptists even then opposing it as church-state mixing. The social involvement chapter has a good historiographical moment buried in the footnotes; in it Shepherd notes that the traditional approach was to view southerners as largely uninvolved. He takes the newer approach that there's more than first meets the eye. Still, careful examination of the long list of achievements reveals that the same names recur over time and movement. This raises the possibility that Shepherd is downplaying, maybe neglecting, the number of antis or indifferents. A few numbers would help to answer the question of how many engaged in progressive activity, and how many fought it or ignored it.

The topical approach does create problems of flow; it's easy to lose track of the overall development when each category encompasses a thirty-year period. And sometimes the topics might be better arranged: the political structure of Richmond over the thirty years was key to much of the change that took place and to the stifling of the progressive impulse in the 1920s. Yet Shepherd elects to discuss it at the end of the chapter instead of at the beginning where it could provide needed context. The topical approach also covers the absence of complete chronology, if that's a problem (and it is in the early part of Chapter 9, with only a handful of references to illustrate the thirty years of Protestant-Jewish relations). The approach is the classic style that makes the Louisiana State University's twentieth century volumes so impressive to behold and so difficult to read. It has the thoroughness that makes dissertations so painful to read. But, just when it seems that there is no end to the discrete facts, the telling anecdote, the expanded story, the spark of life saves the day.

Still, it's institutional history. All the way, Shepherd shows the churches doing, the church leaders, including laypeople, doing. And there are the statistics of improvement–reduction in prostitution, prohibition, cleaned up government, but nothing outright on the impact. The big unanswered question is how did peoples' lives change? What did the masses of church members do after church, what was their religious experience like? Questions of that sort have no institutional answers. And another question needs an answer: why? What motivated these progressives, and what made them different from their peers who did not do these things? This is a meticulous, old fashioned story of the role of one variety of religious institution in one particular location during one period of time. For what it is it is good, really good– for what it might be it disappoints. It is not fair to ask Shepherd to write another book. Fair or not, that's the way it is. And that helps to explain why there is a dearth of good histories– it's too hard to do.

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