

Larry L. McSwain, ed., W. Loyd Allen, historical consultant. *Twentieth-Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008. Pp. xviii + 354. \$45.00. Cloth.

Twentieth-Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics is a collection of sixteen essays about Baptist advocates of social ethics and activism. Editor Larry McSwain explains in the Preface that Baptists are diverse people with a variety of social ethics—from radical to conservative. However, this book is not a survey of the wide-ranging ethical views among twentieth-century Baptists. Instead, the contributors combine to tell the story of Baptist leaders who advanced a social understanding of Christianity, and “whose central vision was social change” (xv). In addition to historical treatment, this book seeks to commend the ethical consciousness of its subjects, keeping their “influence alive for another generation” (xviii).

Many of the chapters follow a similar form: a brief biographical treatment of the leader, followed by a survey of his or her ethical teaching and activism, and concluding with some comments on the leader’s significance for Baptist social ethics today. The book is divided into three parts. Part I focuses on three early twentieth-century leaders who represent the new social consciousness that appeared among Baptists of the time. Predictably, the first chapter describes the life and thought of Walter Rauschenbusch. Rauschenbusch appears several times in subsequent chapters as a kind of fountainhead that influenced later streams of the Social Gospel tradition in Baptist life. The other two figures in the first section are much less well known. Muriel Lester was an activist for peace during both world wars, and the founder of both the Kingsley House and the Save the Children Fund. Nannie Helen Burroughs who helped found and lead the Women’s Convention of the National Baptist Convention in 1900, embraced the Social Gospel and led others to embrace a more holistic approach to missions.

Part II focuses on five thinkers and teachers who spread the ideas of social Christianity through their classrooms and writings: T. B. Maston, Henlee H. Barnette, James McClendon, J. Deotis Roberts, and Paul D. Simmons. While these figures had significant differences, some common elements appear in the chapters. Each spent much of his life teaching in seminaries (four of the five spent many years in Southern Baptist schools), where they influenced a generation of Baptists with their ethical teachings and example. Maston and Barnette shared an ethical method, which integrated the findings of social science with a higher-critical biblical hermeneutic, focused on the spiritual and moral sense of Scripture rather than particular biblical laws. McClendon, Roberts, and Simmons, while not identical, utilized more post-modern methods, emphasizing things like dialogue and communal and relational readings of Scripture. Each of them advocated controversial ideas and often received great criticism. For example, Simmons’s defense of abortion and euthanasia set him at odds with an increasingly pro-life administration at Southern Seminary in the 1980s. Maston’s and Barnette’s promotion of segregation and racial equality, along with Barnette’s and McClendon’s opposition to the Vietnam War received opposition from large segments of their constituency. Finally, these men were activists. One served in a city mission, another attempted to organize faculty protests, and several protested wars and agitated for civil rights. In addition to teaching students, they wanted to change the world.

Part III consists of eight chapters about Baptist activists who spent much of their lives putting the ideas of social Christianity into action. David Stricklin tells the story of Koinonia Farm and its founders, offering the lifestyle and activism of its founders as a counter-balance to what he describes as oppressive, militaristic, and racist attitudes common today among

evangelicals in the South. Andrew M. Manis's chapter on Martin Luther King Jr. argues that King is now so highly thought of in this conservative age because his radical, liberal, prophetic writings have been largely ignored. Manis seeks to remedy this ignorance by tracing the more radical turns in King's thought, such as his move toward socialism and strong stance against the Vietnam War. David P. Gushee contributes a valuable chapter about the "just peacemaking theory" of Glen Harold Stassen—now a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. Gushee outlines Stassen's little known (at least among conservative Christians) middle option, between pacifism and just war theory, making the case for why it is needed at this time in our nation's history. Other chapters look at Jimmy Carter, Tony Campolo, James M. Dunn and J. M. Dawson, C. Anne Davis, founding dean of the Carver School of Social Work, and Foy Valentine, longtime secretary of the Christian Life Commission of the SBC. This third part is a hodgepodge of activist Baptists. It offers several compelling, though unconnected, stories of how Baptists have sought to bring about social change.

The nature of this book, with its brief overview chapters, will leave the reader with many questions about these often complicated leaders. The "Selective Bibliography" (317–343), which lists primary and secondary sources for each of the figures in the book, will make this a resource when beginning research on these figures—especially the lesser known ones. Another strength of the book is that it shows some of the many ways in which Baptists contributed to racial equality before, during, and after the Civil Rights Era. No reader will agree with all of the ethical positions presented in this book, but all Christians should be able to commend the moral courage and righteous stand taken by many Baptists against racial injustice.

The main weakness of this volume is its failure to interact with a wider variety of Baptist social ethicists and ethics. For example, one does not have to be a right-wing evangelical to note the absence of a chapter on Carl F. H. Henry, whose prolific writings on social ethics influenced thousands of evangelicals to re-engage the culture and fight social manifestations of sin. Not only are conservative leaders excluded as main subjects of the chapters, their arguments and ideas are often ignored. For example, in his chapter on the bioethics of Paul D. Simmons, David McKenzie offers an unquestioned description and commendation of Simmons's defense of abortion. He claims that Simmons's work "serves as an effective refutation of this [conservative anti-abortion] rhetoric" (142), but nowhere presents the conservative argument against abortion. While most of the chapters merely ignore more conservative Baptist positions, open hostility towards their views is evident in several places. One should also note that a concluding essay identifying "key issues and potential trends for Baptists" in the post-modern era, which is described on the book jacket and other promotional material, is not actually included in the book itself.

In summary, *Twentieth-Century Shapers of Baptist Ethics* offers a helpful summary of several relatively unknown Baptists, and presents an influential strand of Baptist social ethics with which many are unfamiliar. The editor and contributors have accomplished their goal of keeping the influence of these leaders alive for another generation. However, due to its narrow focus and failure to interact with a wider variety of Baptist social ethics, this book will mainly influence those who are already sympathetic with its views.

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