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Beloved Strangers: Interfaith Families in Nineteenth Century America (Book Review)

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ception of Jonathan Edwards and a few other greats—has not been American Christianity's forte. "It is not so much in thinking," Noll writes, "as in acting that American Christians have affected the world" (208).

Noll's own prodigious learning belies this critique. Indeed, his concluding bibliography—five hundred titles, thematically arranged and judiciously selected—demonstrates not only his command of the literature but also the immense volume of recent historical reflection on American religious history. Among the many fine scholars represented in this list, Noll stands out as both a consummately skilled synthesizer and a uniquely perceptive critic of the American experience.

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Beloved Strangers: Interfaith Families in Nineteenth-Century America. By Anne C. Rose. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001. 288 pp. \$39.95.)

Sociologists show that commitment to marrying within the faith ranks high among the various indices of religiosity. Anne Rose's new book, however, chronicles several dozen lives in which interfaith marriage went hand in hand with religious commitment. Over the course of the nineteenth century (and beyond), interfaith marriage among Jews, Catholics, and Protestants became an increasingly visible practice among wealthy, cosmopolitan Americans. Modernity—a word used too loose-

ly here—was the instigator, as it "forced a reconfiguration of inherited values" (10). In America, the meeting of Judeo-Christian values and "nearly unrestrained liberal principles" moved such communities from their "limited options" to "heterogeneity and openness" (11). By the opening of the twentieth century, religion in interfaith homes had shifted from precept to possibility. Couples in the early 1900s remained religious, though by then they were much less interested in religious institutions and public practice. "My faith," explained Protestant millionaire Graham Stokes two years before he wed a poor Jewish immigrant in 1905, "is something that is between my God and me" (158).

Beloved Strangers is structured as a series of mini-biographies organized thematically into five chapters. Throughout Rose recounts couples' struggles to surmount inherited differences within the context of their newfound political and individual freedoms. Particularly in the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, as interfaith marriages brought vastly different cultures together, a liberal education and upbringing typically laid the foundation. Philadelphia's Irish-born publisher Matthew Carey, a Roman Catholic moving in a predominantly Protestant orbit, had two children who married Protestants. Jacob Mordecai headed a "ritually observant yet intellectually free [Jewish] household" in the antebellum Protestant South. Only three of his thirteen children married Jews, and five were baptized Christian.

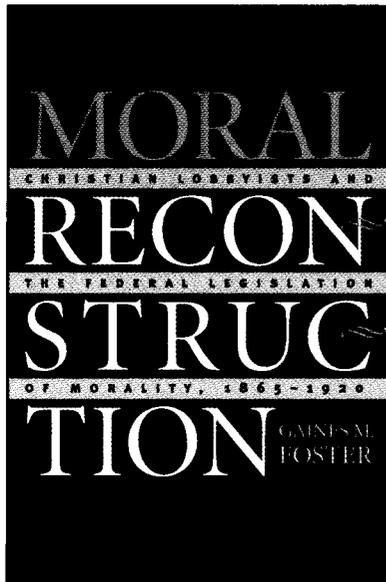
Still, Rose admits that interfaith families were "marginal in nature" (12). The demands of intermarriage often distanced

these couples from the confessional or evangelical preoccupations of the church populations of the United States. Indeed, traditional religious categories and beliefs often disturbed the lives they were attempting to create. Clerical elites condemned and by various means attempted to prohibit interfaith marriage, though over time their voice weakened and their policies relaxed. One couple refused to accept religious difference or divorce and so lived apart for decades. This case, however, is the exception to prove the rule, and Rose attributes their incompatibility to a lack of religion: "Neither one was religious enough, at least not in a sense that a compromise about faith might be reached" (110). Interfaith marriages were thus at the center of a shift toward privatized faith, in which traditional authorities lost relevance. Predictably, the couples in this study lived in and around big cities like Washington D.C., Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. They were wealthy, educated, widely traveled, and politically liberal. They could afford, emotionally and financially, to let go of family and friends.

Rose's religious history of interfaith families illumines a world that has largely escaped historical attention and serves as a valuable contribution to our understanding of how individuals appropriate faith traditions in modern America. She offers original and important discussions on the role of women (as spouses) in facilitating the shift to liberalized faith, on the cultural power of the Protestant tradition in nineteenth-century America, and on the role of media in forming opinion on interfaith marriage. *Beloved Strangers*

does not answer every question that readers will have on its topic, but it suggests many more that they would not have considered before reading it.

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Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920. By Gaines M. Foster. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002. 336 pp. \$19.95.)

The emergence of the “Religious Right” in the late 1970s stunned many observers. Efforts to reintroduce prayer in public schools, curb the sexual content of television shows, censor public library books, and outlaw abortion were just some of the goals that this religiously inspired political action movement hoped would reform American society. But this is not the first time in American history that Christians have turned to the federal government to legislate personal conduct. As Gaines

M. Foster, professor of history at Louisiana State University, demonstrates in this book, Christians in the late nineteenth century launched a campaign to expand the moral power of the federal government and to establish the religious authority of the state. Some view it as either the last-gasp effort of backward looking agrarian communities unable to adapt to the realities of industrialization, urbanization, and cultural pluralism; others view it as an attempt by middle-class activists to control immigrant workers and recently freed slaves. Foster’s study avoids such reductionisms. He takes seriously the role that Christians’ values played in the reformers’ efforts to legislate morality. To be sure, Foster does not neglect the role that cultural commitments or class played in the motivating these political activists, but he does not allow them to obscure the important role that religious convictions and morality played in shaping the work of these activists.

The founders of the American Republic, as Foster explores in the opening chapter, established a “secular” state. The U.S. Constitution made no appeals to God or the Bible for sanction and offered no provisions of financial support for an established church. As Foster notes, the First Amendment, with its intrinsic tension between the free exercise clause and the non-establishment clause, did little to undermine the secular nature of the new federal government. While the founders believed that the survival of the new nation depended in part upon moral citizens, they left it up to the individual states and to churches to promote morality. Consequently, before the Civil War, Christians turned to

persuasion, not federal legislation, to convince fellow Americans to act morally.

In subsequent chapters, Foster examines a number of different objectives that these reformers hoped would improve America’s morality. He investigates the repeated efforts to add a preamble to the Constitution that would acknowledge Jesus Christ and the Bible as the foundation of America’s government. Reformers also sought to see laws passed that would outlaw the sale of obscene literature, curb prostitution, and eliminate illegal narcotics. While many of the practices deemed to be sinful and anti-social, such as prostitution and gambling, provoked federal legislation, other objectives, such as anti-divorce laws, ended in failure. Oftentimes when Congress did pass certain laws that restricted personal behavior, it did so only where it had immediate legal jurisdiction over a given region, such as the District of Columbia, military bases, and the Indian territories. For example, while Congress banned the sale of alcohol on military posts, it was wary of expanding such legislation to the nation at large. Sometime race more than religion motivated Congress to act. For example, the prohibition of the sale of alcohol in the Indian territories was based on two assumptions: first, racist views concerning the inferiority of Native Americans and second, the fear that liquor fueled Native American aggression against whites.

Foster pays close attention to how moral reform organizations, such as Frances Willard’s Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and Wilbur Crafts’s International Reform Bureau, not only pressured Washington