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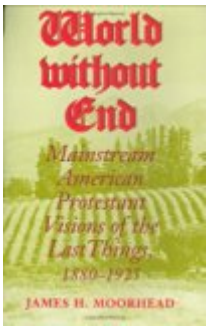

James H. Moorhead. *World Without End: Mainstream American Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880-1925.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999. xxii + 241 pp. $29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-253-33580-7.

Reviewed by Melissa Kirkpatrick

Published on H-AmRel (June, 2000)

As new denominations and sects began offering their therapeutic wares to people seeking faith and reassurance at the turn of the twentieth century, it became all too clear that the traditional Church was no longer the only vehicle by which people might give expression to their Christian aspirations. This period saw a resurgence of older therapeutic efforts such as water-cure, theosophy, new thought, denominations like Christian Science and quasi-denominational groups such as The Salvation Army, as well as new areas of study in sociology and psychology. Churches faced the challenges presented to hegemonous American Protestantism by massive immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The rise of scholarly challenges to theology -- in the form of German-born Biblical textual criticism and, later, the rise of fundamentalism in America -- also contributed to the milieu in which mainline Protestant churches had to accommodate their work. All these contributed to the dis-ease with which Protestant churches faces the opening decades of the century.

Into this mix, James Moorhead, professor of American church history at Princeton Seminary, brings a study of American postmillenial ideas that, since the time of the first Great Awakening, pointed Americans toward a definite end of history, characterized by judgment and transcendental mystery. By the end of the nineteenth century, with apocalyptic terrors fading in the public mind, an eschatology of efficiency, expertise, and eternal progress replaced older images of heaven and hell. Prof. Moorhead describes a shift from a firm belief in an endpoint in time and a sure judgment to an understanding of history carefully distanced from the somewhat messy notion of apocalypse. The open-ended process he describes corresponds to the emerging ethos of consumerism, which encouraged people to define themselves in terms of their needs and wants, their unsatisfied longing.

Professor Moorhead finds himself in agreement with the work of James Turner and other scholars. Liberal Protestant theology and practice aided in doing away with the sense of awe and mystery so central in elements of eschatology.

While admirable social activism was encouraged, churches may have lost the ability to address congregants' most fundamental fears and, in fact, done away with some of the most powerful forces for social change.

The leading churchmen and reformers of the period wanted to create a kingdom "as wide as the earth itself," (p. 122) but it was a kingdom, in H. Richard Niebuhr's words, without judgment. Entranced by scientific expertise and notions of professionalized service, they looked toward a kingdom devoid of transcendent ends whose eschatology was expressed by Walter Rauschenbusch "in terms of historical development [that] has no final consummation." "The process of the kingdom was the goal of the kingdom." (p. xvi)

This work, part of the excellent series "Religion in North America," edited by Catherine Albanese and Stephen Stein, takes full advantage of recent work on consumerism, on the social gospel, on the movement in foreign missions, and in ecumenicism and views the shifting image of American Protestantism through the lens of postmillenialism. Professor Moorhead has been a principal interpreter of these ideas in American thought since his early book, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860-1869*. The present work continues the study into the Progressive era and through the First World War and considers the shift in understanding of end-times seriously, as a more complex issue for the churches than mere secularization.

This is a broadly researched intellectual history with its feet on the ground. Ideas play out in actions, have consequences in deeds. Professor Moorhead shows us how revisions in American understanding of eschatology connected with the rise of historical Biblical criticism, the development of the industrial efficiency movement, the adoption by the churches and other institutions of various tactics (marketing, advertising, organizational methods) of big business. He discusses popular, secular writers of the period in terms of the move away from horrifically vivid images of end-times and carries his discussion through the first World War and the rise of fundamentalism. This strong account of the context of Protestant change, including the "dizzying round" (p. 110) of social reform movements of the period makes this a fine work to use in a general course on the era, showing well how the Progressive era movements and changes affected every American institution.

Professor Moorhead sums up the argument noting that, for all the dangers of a literal view of hell and the End, there is more danger in a view of time looping endlessly forward. People, he argues, are both fascinated and repelled by apocalyptic fantasies, but they are not comforted by the idea of an efficiently organized kingdom of an vaguely present diety. Even for activists, for modern social reformers, he argues, zeal for continuing reform efforts is hard to maintain without a since that there is a grand future in store, that the Kingdom of God is truly under construction. The search for ultimate meaning goes on.

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Citation: Melissa Kirkpatrick. Review of Moorhead, James H. *World Without End: Mainstream American Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880-1925.* H-AmRel, H-Net Reviews. June, 2000.

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