In *American Crusade*, Benjamin J. Wetzel takes on the complex relationship between religion and nationalism in the United States. Through a comparative analysis, Wetzel examines why mainline white Protestant leadership endorsed three major wars fought by the United States between 1860 and 1920. Wetzel argues that during the Civil War, Spanish-American War, and World War I, despite the literature often separating them as distinct periods, leading Calvinist Protestant ministers drew on similar themes and ideas to make a case for armed conflict. He demonstrates how such ideas as American providentialism and Christian democracy were fundamental to how these ministers sanctioned the conflicts but also framed them as “holy wars.” While the focus of the book is on the ideas and perspectives of these leading ministers, Wetzel includes various examples (including from the African Methodist Episcopal [AME] Church, Roman Catholics, and Missouri Synod Lutherans), which he dubs “counterpoint groups,” that serve to highlight opposing perspectives. Drawing on examples from marginalized groups, Wetzel makes the argument that “social location,” or “non-ideological factors—such as race, class, gender, and geographical location,” as well as ideology—affect their perceptions of the political conflicts and views on the relationship between Christianity and the nation (p. 3).

Organized into six chapters and three sections, the book devotes two chapters to every conflict. The first chapter in each section highlights the perspective of mainline white Protestant leaders while the second presents a “counterpoint” example. The book draws on the voices of ministers through major publications and letters to the editors published in a variety of periodicals. Wetzel begins the book examining the perspectives of the Civil War held by three northern ministers, Lyman Abbott, Henry Ward Beecher, and Horace Bushnell. In doing so, Wetzel establishes two fundamental ideological constructs: “American Providentialism,” or the understanding that “God has uniquely blessed the United States,” and “Christian Republicanism,” or the view that Protestantism and political liberty are inherently related (p. 12). The remaining chapters engage with these notions by demonstrating how religious leaders either expanded, rejected, or altered them.

Despite spanning half a century, Wetzel’s narrative is clear and easy to follow, and the author includes historical background and historiographic arguments to provide the reader with the relevant secondary literature. The book’s structure, splitting the book into sections and including diverse perspectives, makes for a history that is multifaceted and multilayered. Moreover, even with the varying perspectives, the examples call atten-
tion to the pervasiveness of US exceptionalist thought in religious justifications for the war, in the discourse of both mainline Protestants and marginalized groups, such as the Missouri Synod Lutherans. In these examples, Wetzel demonstrates how marginalized groups, though often rejecting the rhetoric of mainline Protestant ministers, at times were forced to adopt aspects of them. This was generally the case in moments of intense militarism when maintaining an opposing position could be interpreted as treasonous. Nevertheless, such groups as the Catholics and northern members of the AME Church still forcefully critiqued representations of the United States as a model democratic nation by pointing to the practice of slavery and imperialism. When highlighting these examples, Wetzel uses social location to explain how the actors’ gender, class, and ethnoracial identity likely shaped their perspective.

While I found the arguments about the entanglement between the duties of a Christian and American convincing, Wetzel’s framing of “American Providentialism” and “Christian Republicanism” to explain the phenomenon was at times confusing. Because the two terms are so closely interrelated, it was often difficult to differentiate the ideas and understand exactly how they supported one another. Additionally, the analysis of social location and inclusion of the various counterpoint examples enriched the narrative while also provoking additional questions about the regional and ethnic differences within the various groups. For example, was there a difference in how Black southern ministers viewed the Civil War? How did ethnicity factor into Catholic views on the Spanish-American War? Did the views of Irish immigrants differ from those who were Italian? Finally, since Wetzel points out instances when marginalized groups adopted the language of mainline Protestants because of intense wartime pressures, I wonder how the anti-opposition sentiment of each war contributed to their responses. Was there an increase over time or did it differ by conflict? How did technological innovations in print media affect the circulation of these conceptualizations of the nation and expectations for patriotic citizenship? Lastly, what role did pressure from the actual conflict play into these ideologies? Since these questions may not fall squarely in the scope of the book, I hope they can be addressed by other researchers interested in the subject.

American Crusade is a fascinating history about how Christian duty and patriotic citizenship became intertwined during the three major wars between 1860 and 1920. It is a multisided history that draws on counterexamples to show that while these were prevailing ideas of the time, they were also challenged and shaped by marginalized groups within the United States. Wetzel’s alternative approach to analyzing these three wars together brings to light the continuities in how these wars were justified, and at times promoted, by religious leaders in a way that was unique to the period, where “cautious patriotism” marked the approach of religious leaders in subsequent wars (p. 124).
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