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The Gold Coast Church and the Ghetto: Christ and Culture in Mainline Protestantism by James K. Wellman (Review)

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Indeed, it may still do so. What it does not do, however, is illuminate for students the nature of Mormonism or give the general reader a sense of why this American religion *qua* religion deserves its own book within the Oxford series. Thus for all its strengths—and they are many—*Mormons in America* is a deeply problematic text for the classroom.

Kathleen Flake
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The Gold Coast Church and the Ghetto: Christ and Culture in Mainline Protestantism. By James K. Wellman, Jr. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999. xvi + 257 pp. \$49.95 cloth; \$21.95 paper.

James Wellman's study of Chicago's Fourth Presbyterian Church, the outgrowth of a doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago, is a welcome addition to the still small but growing literature on congregations. The second book on this prestigious church since 1990, it reinforces the case for such studies made in James W. Lewis's *The Protestant Experience in Gary, Indiana, 1906–1975* (1992) and in the essays collected by Lewis and James P. Wind in *American Congregations* (2 vols., 1994). It is also a welcome addition to the literature on mainline and liberal Protestantism, which has gotten short shrift in recent decades.

Wellman's work rests on Fourth Church's archives, pastoral correspondence, sermons, numerous interviews, and a survey of 317 members (summarized in an appendix). His position on the staff while conducting research probably enriched his understanding of contemporary lay and clerical perspectives and of recent congregational developments. Though he writes with an insider's empathy and admires the church's deft balance between Christian witness and cultural relevance, he is not uncritical. His theological erudition is unusual in a congregational history, and he makes fine use of studies of race, politics, crime, public housing, and economic development in Chicago and of works on the reshaping of contemporary American religion.

The story is not comprehensive. Rather, it takes shape from the pastorates of four men who provided extraordinary continuity across most of the twentieth century: John Timothy Stone (1908–28), Harrison Ray Anderson (1928–61), Elam Davies (1961–84), and John Buchanan (1985–present). Except for the Buchanan era, for which Wellman's survey is particularly useful, lay people come into view only occasionally, usually as leaders through whom pastors accomplished their goals. Though their styles and theological orientations varied, these pastors were all compelling preachers, strong leaders, and persons of influence in the community. Each had a knack for ministry among economically and educationally privileged congregants. They certainly deserve the attention Wellman gives them. A less clergy-dominated account would yield different insights, however, and would be a worthy alternative to this one.

H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* (1951) provides the framework for Wellman's characterization of the church during each pastorate. In each case, an analysis of the pastor is the primary determinant of the characterization. Stone represents "the Christ of culture"; Anderson, "Christ and culture in tension"; Davies, "Christ and culture in paradox"; and Buchanan, "Christ transforming culture." The loss of mainline Protestant cultural hegemony permeates Wellman's interpretation. This "second disestablishment" began

while Stone was still pastor. Religious competition increased across the twentieth century, while a host of social, intellectual, and cultural forces vastly expanded opportunities for the exercise of personal freedom in matters of belief, taste, and lifestyle, until Fourth Presbyterian found itself "but one pillar among many in American society" (7). Wellman's rationale for characterizing each pastor's understanding of the relationship of Christ and culture as he does is complex, however, and includes the pastor's theology and social attitudes, changes in the church's ecology, and other variables.

The distance from Stone to Buchanan is indubitably great, whether one compares Stone's evangelical belief in salvation through Christ alone and aggressive advocacy of evangelism and missions with Buchanan's theological liberalism and emphasis on service to the needy, or Stone's social conservatism with Buchanan's deep concern about race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Yet Niebuhr's categories do not seem entirely suitable to a church that, from first to last, has been attuned to the cultural tastes, values, and class interests of those firmly ensconced in the top layers of American society. Considered sociologically rather than theologically, the difference between Stone and Buchanan appears less great than Niebuhr's terms suggest, and Buchanan's church does not seem to represent "Christ transforming culture."

Wellman's demonstration that the church today reflects "lay liberalism," a term originated by Dean R. Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald A. Luidens in *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers* (1994), seems incongruent with the assertion that it stands for the transformation of culture by Christ. The survey results and Buchanan's sermons reveal the dominance of the lay liberal perspective, which includes a nondogmatic understanding of Christianity, reluctance to judge other viewpoints, individualism on moral issues, and acceptance of the legitimacy of privilege coupled with concern for the needy. Wellman himself calls Fourth Presbyterian's lay liberalism "the fullest accommodation of the church to modern liberal trends in culture" (155). There is little parishioner support for restructuring of American social and economic institutions, and transformation is primarily within the lives of the individuals who serve and those who receive the service, as in the church's outstanding tutoring program at the Cabrini-Green housing project, to which Wellman gives considerable attention.

Contrary to Hoge, Johnson, Luidens, and others who suggest that a church's strength depends on the demands it makes or an authoritative belief system, Wellman demonstrates the compatibility of lay liberalism and institutional success, even though he admits that lay liberalism "tends to undercut strong commitment" (165). With four thousand members, a packed sanctuary any Sunday morning, an enormous endowment, and thriving social ministries, Fourth Church tolerates diverse beliefs and relies on rational persuasion rather than imperatives, while providing the elegant worship and outlets for benevolence its members desire. Clearly, churches besides conservative ones can thrive in a radically altered society.

Fourth Presbyterian's strength is the result of three historical factors, Wellman convincingly argues. One is an ecology that has included both concentrated wealth and talent on North Michigan Avenue and a poorer district that became an African American ghetto. Perhaps ironically, this dualistic ecology has been symbiotic, with the proximity of people separated by class and race providing a challenge to the congregation's social conscience and channels for its expression. The second factor is identity, which

is arguably more important than theology for healthy churches of all kinds. Fourth Church's awe-inspiring architecture, superb music, exceptional preaching, insistence on excellence, and high social status drew crowds over the decades, while lay liberalism is an additional identifying element today. Finally, the pastors were skilled at exercising leadership to minimize public conflict.

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Robert E. Speer: Prophet of the American Church. By John F. Piper, Jr. Louisville, Ky.: Geneva Press, 2000. xxii + 538 pp. n.p.

The publication of John Piper's biography of Robert E. Speer restores the Presbyterian mission leader, ecumenist, and churchman to his rightful place at the center of early twentieth-century American Protestantism. This long-awaited work is a massive study on the order of C. H. Hopkins's *John R. Mott* (Eerdmans, 1979) and R. M. Miller's *Harry Emerson Fosdick* (Oxford University Press, 1985). Comprehensive in scope, it necessitated many years of research in archival collections, including personal papers and official reports. Speer was not an easy subject. As author of seventy books, thousands of pamphlets and articles, and numerous official documents, he left a huge paper trail. It is not surprising that a major biography is appearing only now, fifty years after his death. John Piper Jr., a professor of history at Lycoming College, has produced a balanced study that makes a substantial contribution to the histories of American missions, ecumenism, and Presbyterianism.

Given the scope of the task, the biography proceeds according to theme rather than to strict chronology. After treating Speer's youth in a pious Presbyterian family in Pennsylvania, Piper explores his personal conversion and call to a missionary vocation while a student at Princeton College in the late 1880s. Chapter 3 is especially helpful in laying out the approach to Bible study and theology that characterized Speer's thought. His major contributions to American Protestantism are treated in separate chapters: as a founder and first official traveling secretary of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, as secretary of the Presbyterian mission board from 1891 to 1937, as an ecumenical leader active at both international and national levels, as president of the Federal Council of Churches from 1920 to 1924, as church historian, opponent of racism, moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1927, and more. Of particular significance was Speer's self-conscious decision to remain a layman. A reconciler who rejected theological factionalism and clericalism, Speer in 1924 was chosen by twenty-two thousand readers of *The Christian Century* as one of the twenty-five greatest leaders of the church—"the men of deepest and most prophetic vision" (61). His skill as a peacemaker was most evident during the fundamentalist-modernist controversy that threatened to tear apart the Presbyterian Church. With an abiding faith in Jesus Christ and a powerful intellect, Speer also led his mission board through the controversies generated by the critical report produced by the Laymen's Foreign Missions Enquiry (*Re-Thinking Missions*) in 1932.

Piper does a good job in showing that Speer's personality and theology must be read together to explain his career. A studious introvert who disliked the spotlight, Speer was also a workaholic. His devotion to religious duty