

A Case Study of Mainstream Protestantism: The Disciples' Relation to American Culture, 1880–1989. Edited by D. Newell Williams. (Grand Rapids, Mich., and St. Louis: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company and Chalice Press, 1991. Pp. vii, 578. Notes, bibliography, tables, figures, index. Paperbound, \$39.95.)

A Case Study of Mainstream Protestantism is another example of the rapidly developing interest among historians in the more recent history of the “mainline” Protestant denominations. Spurred by present-day massive membership losses among those church bodies, and the need, in part, to explain why, and funded generously by the Lilly Endowment in Indianapolis, these studies are providing for the first time a detailed understanding of the recent history of key and long-established groups in American Protestantism.

This book follows a format already established by the Presbyterians in a series of volumes edited by Milton Coalter, John Mulder, and Louis Weeks. Editor D. Newell Williams places a large number of brief essays on a wide variety of topics inside the covers of a single book in contrast to the Presbyterians’ decision to publish seven small but separate volumes, each on a single, unified theme. This reader feels that Williams attempts too much in one large effort. The essays focus especially on theological-biblical and educational trends among the Disciples over the last century and also analyze very recent developments in the denomination, using statistical data and social science techniques to provide some understanding of the large declines in membership among the Disciples in the past two decades. The editor includes a very useful introductory essay that helps to tie together thematically much of the material, but the book seems unbalanced in its treatment of topics and bears too much the earmarks of the conferences of church people and academics that spawned it.

At several points *A Case Study* hints at racial conflicts within the denomination, yet there is no systematic consideration of that important but still neglected subject (such an essay was presented verbally but not prepared for print). A young historian who recently has reflected sensitively about women in American Protestantism wrote an essay for this book—but not about women among the Disciples of Christ! This reviewer also regrets that there was no attempt to explore fully the historical significance of the large schisms that since 1880 have at times bedeviled the Disciples. If examined closely, these rendings of the denominational garments surely would have provided significant insights into the socioreligious nexus of the Disciples in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And an essay devoted to the Disciples’ attraction-repul-

sion with major American expressions of ecumenism such as the Federal or National Councils of Churches might have illuminated the denomination's commitments in the twentieth century to its historic belief in Christian unity.

Despite these questionings this book constitutes an important first effort in establishing the recent history of a significant group within American Protestantism, a group rooted throughout its history in the Midwest and especially in Indiana. One hopes that this set of essays will encourage further investigations so that an almost complete picture of this distinctive, Hoosier-influenced church can be achieved.

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Simple Decency & Common Sense: The Southern Conference Movement, 1938-1963. By Linda Reed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. Pp. xxvii, 257. Illustrations, bibliographical essay, appendix, notes, index. \$29.95.)

In the late 1930s what George Washington Cable once called the "Silent South" became vocal in decrying the cost to the South of white racism. Southern white liberals from the academy, the labor movement, politics, and journalism joined with prominent African Americans to denounce the poll tax, advocate passage of a federal antilynching law, publicize the South's special economic problems, and agitate for an interracial liberal-labor-Negro coalition to supplant Dixie's white supremacist Democratic parties. In 1938 a galaxy of prominent southern progressives—one-third of them African American—met in Birmingham, Alabama, in unsegregated sessions, to establish the Southern Conference for Human Welfare.

The brief, yet vital, history of the SCHW, and of its successor, the Southern Conference Educational Fund, has been recounted before, notably in Thomas Krueger's *And Promises to Keep* (1967) and in Irvin Klibaner's doctoral dissertation on the SCEF. Many of the key individuals and issues associated with the SCHW and SCEF have been the subject of fine recent biographies and monographs. But never before Linda Reed's *Simple Decency & Common Sense: The Southern Conference Movement, 1938-1963* has the mission of these reformers been so exhaustively researched, deftly analyzed, comprehensively examined, and so sensitively, so compassionately portrayed.

Reed argues that the campaigns of the Southern Conference Movement laid the groundwork for the militant civil rights movement of the 1960s. To buttress that contention she has mined the