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Gene Zubovich. *Before the Religious Right: Liberal Protestants, Human Rights, and the Polarization of the United States*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022. ISBN: 9780812253689.

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Gene Zubovich's ambitious new book, *Before the Religious Right: Liberal Protestants, Human Rights, and the Polarization of the United States*, offers an intellectual, religious, and transnational history of American ecumenical Protestants in the middle of the twentieth century. Well written and clearly argued, the book explores the intersection of race, religion, and rights for what are often described as mainline Protestants.

Zubovich seeks to explain how ecumenical Protestants made human rights a domestic, rather than solely an international, issue for the United States in the 1940s. He reveals the domestic implications of ecumenical Protestants' increasing turn toward social reform in education, health, and development abroad. In this respect, his book echoes David Hollinger's *Protestants Abroad* in its focus on the unanticipated domestic consequences of Protestants' international ambitions and activities.[1]

H-Diplo readers will be particularly interested in Zubovich's complicated portrayal of future Secretary of State John Foster Dulles as he struggled to reconcile conflicting objectives for a postwar order. For example, he ultimately undermined attention to human rights within the United Nations context for the sake of waging the Cold War. Whereas others have written a story of decline for US attention to human rights amidst rising Cold War tensions, in Zubovich's telling, "ecumenical Protestants became one of the most important custodians of human rights in an era when human rights were largely ignored by the US government" (116).

In related or parallel process, Zubovich shows how many ecumenical Protestants developed an uncomfortable relationship with the Western postwar order, including key elements of containment such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Ultimately, Zubovich reveals that ecumenical Protestants reconciled these different impulses with an international vision that pressed for social justice both domestically and internationally, particularly in Asia, where many had served as missionaries. For Zubovich, their approach represented "an alternative to the Cold War framework" (191). These competing visions ultimately led to a break between Dulles and ecumenical Protestants over the issue of recognition of the People's Republic of China, which the latter favored.

One consequence of the rise of the religious right in our time has been that evangelicals have come to overshadow ecumenical Protestants, not just in politics and society, but also in historical accounts. Zubovich sets out to rectify this omission through his research in the records of religious denominations such as the

[1] David A. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

Congregational Church, organizations such as the Federal Council of Churches, and key religious figures such as Harvard philosopher William Ernest Hocking.

With his book's title, *Before the Religious Right,* Zubovich implies there was a lost opportunity for a different approach to rights and religious activism in American politics. In some respects, the book outlines ecumenical Protestants' vision of the role of the United States in the world. As a testament to the saliency of ecumenical Protestants' ideas in the 1930s, Zubovich shows how their rhetoric was appropriated by President Franklin Roosevelt. Yet, he notes that they struggled to separate the global from the local, seeing the two instead as intrinsically "intertwined" (85).

Zubovich recounts how, a decade later, former missionaries mobilized against Japanese-American internment and that their activism culminated in a disavowal of racial segregation by ecumenical Protestants, forever shifting their churches against racial discrimination. In subsequent years, perhaps disillusioned by US foreign policy, ecumenical Protestants increasingly turned their attention to fighting against Jim Crow.

Over time, however, as Zubovich details, the ecumenical Protestant consensus on race and economic policy broke down with many different fault lines emerging in the late 1960s. In the epilogue, Zubovich notes the physical departure of many key 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s-era ecumenical Protestant leaders. But more than generational change, this community faced divisions over gender and sexuality on top of the existing debates over race and economics. From Zubovich's perspective, ecumenical Protestants "widened" these divisions through their "human rights activism" (310). And, given these openings, conservative Evangelicals ascended within American politics and society, leading to the religious and political decline of liberalism in the United States.

Beyond the book's interventions in US political and religious history, Zubovich makes a number of contributions to the literature on human rights. First, he revives older debates about the periodization of US attention to human rights, asserting the significance of the 1940s and arguing that we must recognize the influence that ecumenical Protestants had on the fulfillment of human rights abroad and at home. Second, Zubovich's efforts to bridge the domestic and international in discussing US policy are significant. Activists and policymakers too often at the time, as well as scholars and the broader public retrospectively, have treated human rights as an international issue and deployed the terms civil rights or political, economic, and social rights when discussing problems at home.[2] In line with the ecumenical Protestants he studies, Zubovich argues this division is false. Third, in contrast to works that have emphasized the Catholic or Jewish attention to human rights internationally, Zubovich uncovers what he sees as the ecumenical Protestant origins of human rights in the 1940s.[3] Finally, Zubovich sees mass popular engagement with human rights issues, through letter-writing campaigns and demonstrations, long before Samuel Moyn argues that attention to human rights emerged "seemingly from nowhere."[4]

As part of this earlier activism, Zubovich reveals that the dominant Protestant body, the Federal Council of Churches, advised that the United States should improve its human rights record through "remedial action within their own borders" as a means to model a strong human rights record (184). This approach

[2] For the history of this tactical distinction, see Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6.

[3] For other interpretations, see Nathan Kurz, *Jewish Internationalism and Human Rights After the Holocaust* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Marco Duranti, *The Conservative Human Rights Revolution: European Identity, Transnational Politics, and the Origins of the European Convention* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); and James Loeffler, *Rooted Cosmopolitans: Jews and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

[4] Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 3.

foreshadows the Biden administration's current focus on democracy promotion at home to ensure a more robust community of democracies abroad.[5]

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[5] Sarah B. Snyder, "Biden's push for human rights includes needed democracy-building at home," *Washington Post,* July 11, 2022.