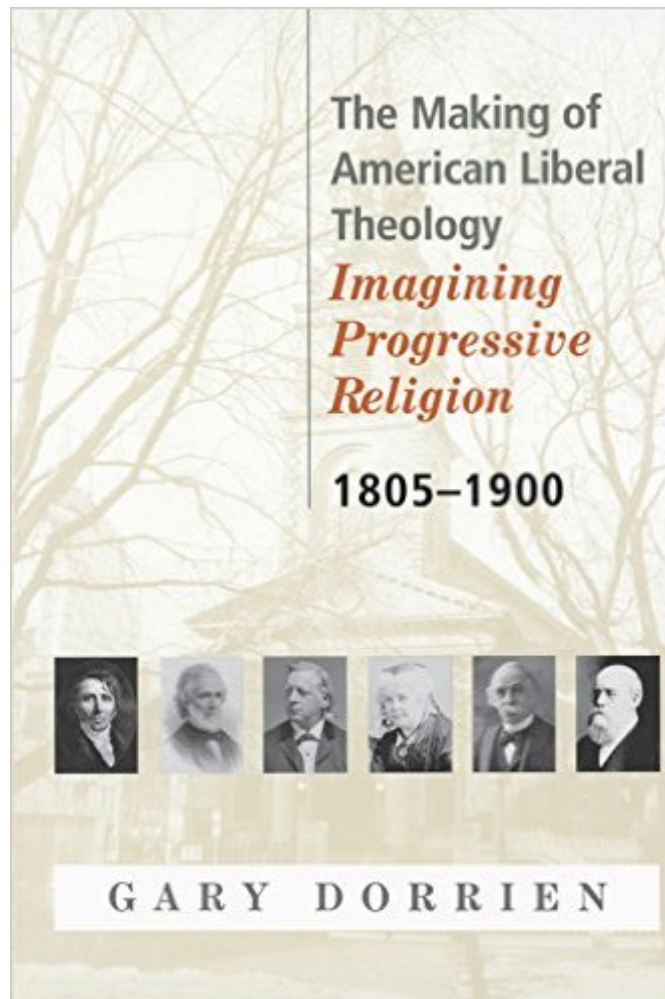


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The Making Of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805 - 1900



Synopsis

In this first of a three-volume, comprehensive series, Gary Dorrien mixes theological analysis with historical and biographical detail to present the first comprehensive interpretation of American theological liberalism. Arguing that the indigenous roots of American liberal theology existed before the rise of Darwinism, Dorrien maintains that this tradition took shape in the nineteenth century and was motivated by a desire to map a progressive "third way" between authority-based orthodoxies and atheistic rationalism. Dorrien characterizes American liberal theology by its openness to historical criticism and evolutionary theory, its commitment to the authority of individual reason and experience, its conception of Christianity as an ethical way of life, and its commitment to make Christianity credible and socially relevant to modern people.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Dorrien's book provides a well-written and informed look at the roots of American liberal theology. Dorrien starts with the Unitarians (most notably Ralph Waldo Emerson -- did you remember he was a minister from high school?) and considers other forerunners such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's brother and Elizabeth Cody Stanton. I am a firm believer in complicated information presented in an easily read fashion, and Dorrien's book fits the bill. I've actually been reading a history of Atonement Theory and Trinitarianism for light bedtime reading because it's so fascinating. Dorrien explores theology through biography, painting a realistic picture of the all-too-human proponents of the theory of the Divine. I also appreciate learning about the historical roots of an informed, loving, intelligent

Christian faith that sought to fight against the fire-and-brimstone intolerant exclusivism of its day. A must read for Bible and religion students, seminarians, historians, and anyone who wishes to claim the historical roots of progressive Christianity.

This set by Dr. Gary Dorrien of Union Theological Seminary is an outstanding resource for anyone who wonders why they gravitate toward the tradition of American liberal theology. Recently I traveled to Boston to visit the West Roxbury Unitarian Church where an early liberal highlighted by Dorrien in this collection, Theodore Parker, served as preacher and theologian during the years that Brook Farm was in operation, 1840-1847. The local West Roxbury library has a rare collection of newspaper articles from this era. My interest was to learn more about the influence of this liberal thinker on the emerging consciousness of Elizabeth Cady Stanton who lived in Boston from 1840-1847 and attended his lecture series. Without this historical encounter, the subsequent 1848 Women's Rights Convention may not have happened!

Very thorough look at an often ignored area of American intellectual history; Dorrien makes it clear that--whatever we may think today in light of the conservative evangelical fundamentalist revival of the past 40 years, "Liberal Religion" has far more important in 19th century American history than we have been led to believe. I am looking forward to reading volumes II and III.

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