

ingway to James Baldwin, the sharpest observers of American life went to Paris (always Paris) to find the distance they needed.

Caws, a professor at the City University of New York, and Wright, an independent scholar, contend that such alchemy goes a long way toward explaining the high-modernist carryings-on of the English clique known as Bloomsbury. The members of the Bloomsbury group frequently visited France to relax, to paint, to visit friends. The Bloomsbury artists, particularly Roger Fry, Duncan Grant, and Vanessa Bell, spent years in a succession of rented Provençal villas, painting fishing boats and still lifes and writing enthusiastic letters home about the quality of the light. A few of the writers—notably Dorothy Strachey Bussy, Lytton Strachey's sister, who translated André Gide's work into English—contributed significantly to the flow of French literary ideas to England.

But all this is very far from demonstrating that France exerted a formative influence on any of Bloomsbury's truly major figures—

Virginia Woolf, say—or that, as the book jacket claims, “without France there would have been no Bloomsbury.” The text falls far short of such arguments, instead providing a compendium of Bloomsbury travel trivia, an album for aficionados who want to hear not what the artists and writers discussed at Pontigny but rather that Lytton Strachey when there “suffered terribly from the absence of his usual egg at breakfast.” The authors report every detail of the Woolfs' cross-Channel trips, including the fact that, while driving south on March 26, 1928, Virginia “had to replace her woolen jersey with a silk one because of the increasing heat.”

This is not the stuff of which significant cross-cultural influence is made. Whatever the role of the French connection in the English avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s—and hints dropped here and there suggest that it was, indeed, more than trivial—it is not to be unearthed from this catalogue of Bloomsbury's ultimately run-of-the-mill Francophilia.

—Amy Schwartz

Religion & Philosophy

THE HEART IS A LITTLE TO THE LEFT:

Essays on Public Morality.

By William Sloane Coffin.

Dartmouth/New England. 95 pp. \$15.95

HERE I STAND:

My Struggle for a Christianity of Integrity, Love and Equality.

By John Shelby Spong. Harper. 464 pp.

\$25

FAITH WORKS:

Lessons from the Life of an Activist Preacher.

By Jim Wallis. Random House. 400 pp.

\$23.95

If the Protestant Right is too much with us, where is the Protestant Left? These three books may help us see.

William Sloane Coffin is the ghost of Christian Liberalism Past. Chaplain of Yale University during the Vietnam years, then senior minister of Riverside Church in New York City, he stands for engagement in the

world. Like liberal Protestant leaders since the early 19th century, he brings the Christian voice to the public table in a genial, reformist, and nonproselytizing way. In this slight collection of college talks, Coffin comes out foursquare for love, multiculturalism, and helping the poor, and against national self-righteousness, homophobia, and war. There's not much help here for those looking to sort out the moral conundrums of our time. The discussion of war raises hope that he will wrestle with the challenge of dealing with Iraqis, Serbs, and other contemporary aggressors, but Coffin, president emeritus of the nuclear freeze campaign, smoothly veers off onto the comfortable terrain of anti-nuclearism.

No less self-assured is the ghost of Christian Liberalism Present—John Shelby Spong, the just-retired *évêque terrible* of the Episcopal Church, Diocese of Newark. Spong has made himself notorious by using academic biblical criticism to assail traditional Christian orthodoxy. Along the way, he has championed a liberal ecclesiastical agenda, beginning with

issues of race, poverty, and anti-Semitism, and on through women's ordination and the ordination of noncelibate gays and lesbians. He long ago acquired the habit of writing books; this is his 17th.

Unlike Coffin, Spong has devoted himself to fighting the good fight within his church. *Here I Stand* gives an inside account of various political struggles in Spong's early parishes, his diocese, and the Episcopal House of Bishops; he does not hesitate to blast his reactionary opponents and scold his pusillanimous allies by name. There is material here for a latter-day Trollope, but Spong possesses neither the literary gift nor the sense of humor to pull it off. St. Peter may read him a lesson on humility before letting him through the Pearly Gates.

Spong's war for the soul of Episcopalianism may strike some as too churchly by half, but he has a sharp footnote for ecclesiastics who would devote themselves to issuing pious public pronouncements on issues such as Third World debt: "Church leaders possess little political or economic power to bear on this subject. So talk is cheap, costing the leaders nothing."

Which brings us to Jim Wallis, the ghost of Christian Liberalism Future—maybe. Wallis is Exhibit A in the small display cabinet of contemporary liberal evangelicals. Preacher, activist, editor of *Sojourners* magazine, he lives and works in a poor neighborhood of Washington, D.C., and for years has labored to spread the word of religiously motivated social action for the poor.

His time may be now, and he knows it. Thanks to the "charitable choice" provision of the 1996 welfare reform act—which encourages government funding of religious organizations providing services to welfare recipients—politicians and policy mavens have become enamored of "faith-based" approaches to the nation's social problems. And with this timely though preachy book, Wallis is johnny-on-the-spot.

He makes clear that he opposed the welfare reform act and worries that taking Caesar's coin will rob faith-based social service providers of their prophetic voices. He does not claim to have all the answers. But you can feel his excitement at the prospect of assembling a coalition of hands-on social activists that bridges the divide between the liberal and evangelical churches.

Whether this signals a new Protestant Left is very much an open question. The answer will depend on the willingness of liberal church leaders to rethink their views on the separation of church and state, of conservative church leaders to rethink their views on the evils of government, and of people in the pews to rethink their commitment to the gospel of wealth.

—Mark Silk

***DIVERSITY AND DISTRUST:
Civic Education in a Multicultural
Democracy.***

By Stephen Macedo. Harvard Univ. Press. 343 pp. \$45

Macedo believes that America's recent emphasis on diversity, especially in education policy and the law, does not go far enough toward promoting the shared beliefs and virtues needed to sustain a liberal democratic order. He proposes instead "civic liberalism," a "tough-minded" liberalism with "spine." A professor of political science at Princeton University, Macedo has written a blunt, provocative book that significantly clarifies important issues but is unlikely to foster the thoroughgoing civic agreement he seeks.

Liberal democracy, Macedo insists, is not and cannot be a neutral arena, equally hospitable to all ways of life. Rather, it must employ its formative powers to produce citizens deeply committed to liberal democratic principles and institutions. In particular, liberal public education must challenge the particularist views of parents and insular communities in the name of forming good liberal citizens. At the same time, civic liberalism must avoid becoming what Macedo calls "civic totalitarianism," the kind of comprehensive vision of a democratic order (John Dewey's, for example) that runs roughshod over all particular attachments in the name of science, progress, or national unity.

In the abstract, it is hard to disagree with Macedo's case. Like every other form of political regime, liberal democracy rests on certain moral propositions. The artful arrangement of public institutions—divided powers, checks and balances, federalism—is necessary but not sufficient. Liberal democratic citizens must also have a core of shared beliefs and traits of character. Not all ways of life will be equally conducive to liberal democracy, and some