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Spiritual Socialists
Religion and the American Left
Vaneesa Cook

“In her thought-provoking new book . . . Cook finds in the past ample evidence that the intersection of Christianity and radicalism in the modern United States has been quite bustling . . . Cook has done . . . a tremendous service . . . in lifting up a spiritual-socialist tradition that has languished too long in obscurity.” —Christianity Today

Refuting the common perception that the American left has a religion problem, Vaneesa Cook highlights an important but overlooked intellectual and political tradition that she calls “spiritual socialism.” Spiritual socialists emphasized the social side of socialism and believed the most basic expression of religious values—caring for the sick, tired, hungry, and exploited members of one’s community—created a firm footing for society.

Cook tells her story through an eclectic group of activists whose lives and works span the twentieth century. Sherwood Eddy, A. J. Muste, Myles Horton, Dorothy Day, Henry Wallace, Pauli Murray, Staughton Lynd, and Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke and wrote publicly about the connection between religious values and socialism. By insisting that people start treating each other better in everyday life, spiritual socialists transformed radical activism from projects of political policy-making to grass-roots organizing.

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