**Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction**


Hall, who teaches theological ethics at Duke, combines perceptive reading with stirring criticism of the corporate-inspired family ideals that have come to pervade the American Christian mainstream. Focusing on the Methodist experience, Hall’s narrative potentially resonates across the theological spectrum. How did a denomination with roots in gospel activism come to be so captivated by images of material and technological progress delivered by corporate marketing? Hall mines church publications and popular media to reveal several dynamics at work. Partly by its attempts to market itself as part of the American dream, the mid-century church became infatuated with an image of the ideal family that inevitably, if unintentionally, encouraged middle-class Protestants to insulate their families from their troubled neighbors. At the same time, corporate and scientific messages undermined the confidence of parents—and particularly mothers—in natural or traditional ways of providing for their children without commercial products and expert advice. Aspiration and anxiety combined to create families that were more focused on themselves, less secure in their Christian identity and less engaged in mission to others. Contrasting these trends with the example of Christ and the unifying message of the sacraments, Hall invites her readers to wage a “resistance” and reconsider “the least of these.” (Feb.)