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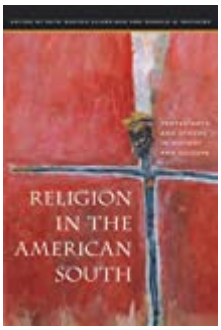

Beth Barton Schweiger, Donald G. Mathews, eds. *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. vi + 340 pp. $70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2906-6; $25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-5570-6.

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Pondering the Direction of Southern Religious History

This collection of ten essays, which includes several written by important scholars of American religion and history, raises questions and offers suggestions regarding the direction of southern religious history. Donald G. Mathews, however, admits that he and co-editor Beth Barton Schweiger have inadvertently produced "a manuscript about Protestantism and southern culture without working from a definition of either." Yet, they recognize the propensity of religion to disregard boundaries and categorizations. Thus, the term "Other" in the book's subtitle is intended to "connote difference (both addressed and ignored), possibility, and God" (pp. 1-2). Understanding "the South" as both a source and a location for religious inspiration and activity, the editors also encourage using southern religion to illuminate American religion, and hope to stimulate questions and new ways of thinking about religion in the South and in America. They likely will succeed as others engage the ideas presented by this book.

As noted in the book, the last volume of essays on southern religion appeared in 1988 with Samuel S. Hill Jr.'s, *Varieties of Southern Religious Experience* (1988). That volume, in general, highlighted the South's distinctive religious culture, particularly with regard to evangelicalism. Subsequent collections of essays on American religion have appeared, but the South is typically not the focus, although it is addressed through studies of southern individuals and movements.[1] Schweiger and Mathews's book does not merely recapitulate what has occurred in southern religious studies since Hill's collection, but instead examines areas overlooked by scholars and suggests new ways to understand standard treatments of other subjects.

For example, the essay by Schweiger encourages viewing southern revivals as expressions of modernity rather than as opponents of it (the more typical understanding). More than simply being manifestations of personal piety, as has been commonly argued, revivals also led to building socially powerful institutions. Yet, even though these institutions ultimately developed into modern bureaucracies that served the interests of those in power, the South's disenfranchised also managed to use them for their own purposes, thus demonstrating why the South is "essential to the story of American Chris-

tianity" (pp. 35-37, 54-56).

Other essays likewise offer re-interpretations or fresh views of various religious experiences, an important aspect of southern religion in need of more attention. Emily Bingham highlights the complexity of conversion by tracing the struggles Rachel Mordecai Lazarus endured as she left Judaism for Christianity. Bingham urges historians to study conversion "not merely as a matter of individual choice or mass movement, but as a process inseparable from families, communities, and the intellectual and emotional lives of men and women" (p. 84). Daniel Woods explores the " 'forgotten world' of early Pentecostal culture" through the experiences and interpretations of God's voice by pioneer southern Pentecostals. He concludes, although tentatively due to his sources representing primarily white and southern members of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, that Pentecostal faith, as well as the movement's rapid growth during the early twentieth century, can be attributed to the revival and development of enthusiastic prayer during a secular era (pp. 125-128, 147). The extension of the Holiness and Pentecostal traditions to the urban North and West by the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) is taken up by Anthea D. Butler. As African Americans left the South from 1914 to 1940, COGIC women, functioning in the traditional role of church mother, maintained their southern identities and church customs while evangelizing other women in their new environments. Holding on to their southern roots proved crucial to their success (pp. 195-199, 214-215). The ability to adapt religious ideals learned in the South also proved important to the success of Gospel singer Rosetta Tharpe. Jerma Jackson examines the religious dimensions of mass-produced culture by showing how Tharpe negotiated the conflicting demands of singing Gospel music in a commercial arena. The singer adapted her faith and music to meet the commercial demands that viewed her music as a commodity, while also maintaining Gospel's original religious purpose of saving souls (pp. 219-221, 232-239).

Some essays challenge traditional understandings often used by historians. Jon F. Sensbach acknowledges the importance of evangelicalism in the South, but cautions that an overemphasis on it can blind scholars to the tremendous religious diversity of the colonial and Revolutionary South from which evangelicalism grew. When the notion of the South is extended beyond the five British colonies to include the area reaching to Texas, the diversity and volatility of the region becomes apparent. The mix of Native American, African, and European religious traditions made the eighteenth century "easily the most volatile and dynamic period in southern religious history" (pp. 7-8).

Kurt O. Berends takes up the debate over how the Civil War shaped Confederate Christianity and concludes that ministers fused personal salvation with faith in the Confederacy. As saving the Confederacy was often equated with saving Christianity, so personal salvation could be attained by both Jesus' death and the soldier's on behalf of the new nation. Rather than using the language of surrender and submission, as had been done in the antebellum period, ministers appealed to notions of honor to make the Gospel more attractive to potential male converts. Confederate Christianity and patriotism, therefore, combined to support and influence each other (pp. 99, 105-107, 109-111).

The fusing of the sacred and secular is further addressed by Donald G. Mathews in his essay that explains lynching as a southern religious experience transcending explanations based on gender, difference, sex, and power. Whites combined evangelical revivalism, which sought cleansing and renewal, with a culture of honor and segregation to justify lynching as an act that renewed and restored the moral order. In doing so, they could better maintain their dignity while participating in an horrendous event. African Americans, however, also turned lynching into a religious experience by identifying with the sufferings of Christ. Rather than experiencing God as a God of white purity, they understood him as a God of black suffering and resurrection, and found a source of hope and encouragement (pp. 154-156, 162-163, 182-183).

The final two essays encourage blurring of common historical categorizations in order to view southern religious history more fully. By focusing on women and southern religion, Lynn Lyerly shows that even though using the divisions of "public" and "private" are helpful in describing women's religious activities, the two should be understood as a continuum rather than as separate spheres. Women participated in public religion, but also had private religious expressions and experiences, and even brought their private activities into the public realm. For instance, women exploited the ambiguous ideal of southern womanhood, which called for a mother to be strong and authoritative, but a wife to be submissive and subservient, in order to expand their roles and challenge gender norms (pp. 248, 264-265). Paul Harvey uses racism, racial interchange, and interracialism in the post-Civil War South to show how white southern Christian racism eventually succumbed to a more inclusive notion advocated by blacks in the civil rights movement.

Rather than viewing this period simply in terms of the conflict and separation of whites and blacks, Harvey also demonstrates the mutual influence and even joint efforts that occurred. Although most examples of interracialism had to take place outside denominational bureaucracies, which for the most part remained segregationist, they nonetheless point to important exceptions to the dominant racism of southern religion (pp. 283-284, 292-293, 307, 313).

Without considering the merits of each essay, the book as a whole presents southern religion as rich and diverse. This is not a new portrait, but the authors call for a further nuanced picture by challenging what have become standard understandings. Particularly appealing are those essays demonstrating the intricate interactions between people, movements, and ideas that historians have tended to place in clearly demarcated camps. The book calls scholars to integrate better their analyses by exploring how people and perspectives interlocked rather than only how they contrasted with each other.

The essays also collectively raise questions regarding what makes southern religion distinctive. Many of the religious aspects addressed in the book are not uniquely southern or restricted to the South (i.e., evangelicalism, racism, gender, revivalism, conversion, wartime use of religion, etc.). Although most of the authors do not address how their topics' southern expression compared to their northern (or eastern or western) counterparts, doing so would help produce a better understanding of *southern* religion. This also would help clarify what is gained or lost by approaching American religion regionally as opposed to doing so by emphasizing various religious traditions (Protestant/Catholic; Jewish/Christian, etc.), historical periods (Colonial, Revolutionary, etc.), or ethnic, social, or gendered perspectives (White/African American/Native American, Slave/Master, Male/Female, etc.). As the book itself reminds us, religion defies categories and boundaries, suggesting that southern religion is at least a mix of regional, historical, ethnic, social, and gendered factors that change over time. Developing a more integrated approach, as reflected in this book, will assist in bringing to light the nature of southern religion, especially as scholars explore how southern religion traversed, as well as upheld, categories and boundaries.

Notes

[1]. Samuel S. Hill Jr., ed., *Varieties of Southern Religious Experience* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988). See also Harry S. Stout and D. G. Hart, eds., *New Directions in American Religious History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); James H. Hutson, ed., *Religion and the New Republic: Faith in the Founding of America* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); and John F. Wilson, *Religion and the American Nation* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

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