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James M. Woods. *A History of the Catholic Church in the American South, 1513-1900.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011. 512 pp. $69.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-3532-1.

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From "See" to Shining "See": Synthesizing Four Centuries of Catholicism in the U.S. South

In *A History of the Catholic Church in the American South, 1513-1900*, James Woods provides a thorough and compelling history of the Roman Catholics in the U.S. South, a region long recognized to be dominated by their archrivals, the Protestants. In so doing, Woods fills a gap in the historiography, which traditionally as well as recently, has marginalized Catholicism as a southern institution and relegated the experience of southern Catholics to a study of relations with other, usually hostile groups, such as Protestants and the Know-Nothing political party. Woods, however, adds to the small, yet growing, body of scholarship which seeks to relate the story of the southern Catholic Church as an American institution unto itself. Without pretense of providing a âjarring or provocativeâ argument (p. xiii), Woods successfully endeavors to produce a much-needed updated synthesis of the history of southern Catholicism. In addition to culling together older and newer scholarship, Woods also examines a great many primary sources to offer valuable original insight into the manner in which global, national, and regional politics have interacted with Catholicism in the region continuously since the sixteenth century.

The bookâs chronological structure and Woodsâs writing mechanics and style make for a very straight forward and easy read. In âThe Colonial Context, 1513-1763,â the first of three parts to the book, Woods describes the experience of the Spanish in Florida and Texas, the French in Louisiana, and the English in the southern British colonies. The remainder of the book presents the story of southern Catholics as Americans and immigrants, with the second part, âAmerican Republicanism and European Decline, 1763-1845,â devoted to the late colonial, Revolutionary, and early republic years. The final part, âResistance, Rebellion, Reconstruction and Regionalism, 1845-1900,â is devoted to the relationship of Catholicism with southern sectionalism, the Civil War, and the postbellum overhaul of southern society which framed the future of southern Catholicism at the dawn of the twentieth century.

Woodsâs writing style is altogether reader-friendly,

an absolute must for a self-described synthesis of four hundred years of regional and religious history, yet he provides cogent and salient analysis without resorting to pedantic or austere language (a skill not so well honed by your reviewer). Perhaps the reader will find the overwhelming procession of names, dates, places, and events a bit tedious, though it is doubtful that one can effectively convey so much data in any other way. The readerâs persistence will be rewarded, however, as Woods reserves the last page or two of each chapter to interpret and intertwine all of the raw data he presents. Thus, Woods effectively locates southern Catholicism within the greater context of the era and region surveyed in each chapter.

Woods succinctly conveys all of the key moments involving the age of exploration; the conquistadors, missionaries, and settlers who first brought Catholicism to American soil; how the turbulent atmosphere in Europe impacted Spanish, French, and English efforts at colonization; and how the emergent and nascent Protestant faith, and its growing legions of devotees and denominations, continuously affected the goals and actions of these colonies. Woods distills three distinct themes of the early American colonial period which impacted the nature and success of the initial presence of Catholics in America: the conjunction of church and state that existed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the interaction with both indigenous nations and peoples, and the interaction, often bellicose in nature, between the Spanish, French, and English monarchies. The main goals of the Spanish crown in Florida and Texas were the conversion of the natives and the creation of a suitable outpost to contain French expansion into the southeast corner of the North American continent, where it posed a direct threat to the Spaniardsâ multiple lucrative possessions in the Caribbean and Mexico. Consistent with the autocratic nature of the Spanish Inquisition, the virulently Catholic kingdom of Spain forbid the practice or profession of any faith other than Roman Catholicism. The French missions emigrated southward from Quebec and established a stronghold in New Orleans in order to convert natives and to counteract and contain the presence of the Spanish Jesuits. Similar to the Spanish restrictions in the Inquisition, the *code noir* (âThe Black Codeâ) was imposed by the French King Louis XV to prevent the practice of Protestantism or Judaism in the vast Louisiana territory.

Of course, England stood in stark contrast to these two nations; it was a bastion of Protestant ascendancy which rendered English Catholics politically and culturally powerless on both sides of the Atlantic. Even though the southern colony of Maryland was founded by the first Lord Baltimore expressly as a haven for Catholics, the prevailing sentiment of the mostly Protestant English colonists routinely undermined and usurped the authority of the Baltimores and the Maryland Catholics. By the end of the seventeenth century, the colonyâs majority Protestant population had established the Anglican church and enacted a Protestant test for occupying public office. With the British Empireâs victory in the Seven Years War in 1763, the British controlled the continent as far south as Florida and as far west as the Mississippi River. As a result, southern Catholicism was swept aside to the margin of American consciousness, where it would by and large remain throughout the nineteenth century.

As Woods makes clear, the rising dominance of evangelical Protestantism in the late colonial and Revolutionary periods belies the significant contributions of Catholics during this period, especially that of the Carroll family. Charles Carroll of Carrollton, one of the richest Catholics in colonial Maryland, was the only Catholic to sign the Declaration of Independence. Charlesâs cousin Daniel Carroll served as a delegate to the constitutional convention, a signer to the U.S. Constitution, and the first Catholic member of the House of Representatives; Danielâs brother John Carroll was appointed by the pope in 1789 as the first American bishop and the city of Baltimore designated the nationâs first see. In the first decades of the new republic, American Catholicism was dominated by the pursuit of obtaining a formal hierarchical structure from Rome, which as Woods deftly delineates, was designed around the major commercial centers, with Baltimore serving as the dioceses for the entire South.

Between 1763 and 1821, Catholicismâs roots in the American South grew deeper and stronger in the midst of a series of international battles and maneuverings which resulted in the United States acquiring all of the lands on the Gulf Coast from Florida to Louisiana. While concluding that neither the Spanish nor the French met their long-term goals regarding Catholic missionary work, Woods carefully reviews the litany of feats that the Spanish and French Catholics did accomplish and which left an indelible and permanent impression on the area nevertheless. Woods ably describes, from the perspectives of the Catholics living in these new southern territories, the transition faced by the priests, missionaries, and laity from living under the control of absentee Catholic empires, either Spain or France, to living among an increasing number of Protestants as members of the new American nation. As the number of Catholics in the South grew and expanded throughout the southern frontier, so too

did the number of dioceses created to oversee them. Each new diocese reflected the experience of the Catholics residing therein, ranging from a firmly established and numerically large base in New Orleans, to starting from scratch in building Catholic institutions in Tennessee, to the struggles for religious equality and political inclusion in the Carolinas.

Woods shifts the attention for the remainder of the book to the role of Catholics in the mainstream issues involving the growing American nation. The southern Catholics were central participants in the larger historical themes of nineteenth-century reform America: reform movements (such as temperance and abolition), massive ethnic immigration (Irish and later Italians), social and political persecution (at the hands of the Know-Nothings in the middle of nineteenth century and in the larger urban centers toward the latter nineteenth century), and an active role in the Civil War and Reconstruction. Rather than placing Catholics on the periphery of these events and measuring how they were affected by these events, Woods places them, and their accomplishments, at the center; he depicts the southern Catholics as a group that exerted its influence on the nature and outcomes of the major events in American history.

Furthermore, Woods does not confine the geographic epicenter of Catholicismâs influence on the nation and the South to large population centers like Baltimore and New Orleans; North Carolinaâs Catholic jurist, William Gaston, and bishop, John England, both distinguished themselves by advocating for moral and humane treatment of both enslaved and free blacks. In Florida, Vicar Apostolic Verotâs 1860 speech, in which he confirmed that slavery was not a moral sin, rallied all of the southern Catholics to support secession and the Confederacy. The postbellum years were daunting ones throughout the South. While southern Catholics faced the common Reconstruction-era challenges of a shattered economy, infrastructure, and social structure, they also faced some problems particular to the region. The Republicans who dominated the region in the first years of Reconstruction were often most hostile to the Catholics, the seat of American Catholicism shifted from Baltimore to New York, and friction developed between Rome and American Catholics, especially southern Catholics.

Woodsâs history of the Catholic Church in the South stands as an impressive display of research, as well as a much-needed and cogent synthesis of the previous scholarship. His most important contribution, however, may be the fact that he de-marginalizes a group that has traditionally been relegated to a passive role in southern history. The history of southern Catholics has finally been told as self-reliant monolith. Similar to the methodology popular among modern historians of southern Jewish history, Woods does not attempt to justify the accomplishments of the Catholics as significant in relation to their Protestant counterparts. Woods holds the significance of the Catholicsâ history in the South as axiomatic; the Catholics were important in the South for no other reason than because they were there and their history is important because it exists. To truly understand the history of the South through the nineteenth century, and its powerful ability to mold the minds of many Americans to this day, one must understand the history of all its components. James Woods provides such a history for the component that was the Catholic Church.

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