John Wolffe. *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843-1945.* London and New York: Routledge, 1994. xii + 324 pp. $69.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-03570-5.

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One New Year's Eve in mid-Victorian London, two Anglo-Catholic clergy were awakened by a large crowd gathering outside their church in the Holborn. They had been reluctant to hold a New Year's service, but were now persuaded to open the doors to enable the poor of the parish to be visited with good luck during the coming year. Despite Victorian clerics' longstanding concern about drawing in congregations, here was one that appeared spontaneously to exercise its preference for the quasi-religion with which formal religion had sometimes only the vaguest connection. John Wolffe in this excellent textbook does much to illuminate the shadows that pervade this area of historical discussion, which has taken place at an unhelpful distance from the more conventional institutional histories of religion. Wolffe himself suggests that his book "explores the interface between 'ecclesiastical' and 'church' history." This, however, is not the only new emphasis to emerge, since the book also reflects the fact that the history of religion in Britain, after a period of considerable eclipse, is at last on the move again. This has been largely the result of developments in both the agenda and perceptions of social historians as well as of those politico/cultural historians interested in the ways and means by which "nationhood" is created.

Social historians have in recent years challenged the long accepted notion of secularization, which has been both rejected by some and had the terms and assumptions of its argument stringently qualified by others. Similarly, the de-centering of class in social history has persuaded more than the post-modernists to look for other areas of loyalty, identity, sentiment, and affiliation, for the working class in particular.

The politico/cultural historians, probably best represented by the work of Linda Colley, are seeking the ways in which allegiance and consent to the nature of the modern British state and identity were canvassed, organized, and displayed. Central to this process was the role of religion, particularly religion allied very closely to the monarchy and, as the century wore on, to the popular notion of imperial achievement.

With these developments a new history of religion is timely, and Wolffe shows considerable skill in addressing these two important trends in historiography without losing the sense of a comprehensive textbook coverage that the history of religion has long craved. In some respects his debt to the work of Linda Colley is rather more than historiographical. The writing is at times fluid and evocative and represents an attempt to get genuinely inside the skin of the subject without sacrificing detail or objectivity. Examples are produced and worked through in a thorough and illuminating manner and many are juxtaposed to produce telling chronological analogies. Like Colley, Wolffe is not afraid of using the architectural and pictorial legacy of "British" culture to demonstrate the finer points of his analysis. In some respects these are traits that we can expect to see more of in this generation of historians, as centrally important social and political institutions of the past and present are unpacked and examined critically.

The preface effectively declares the book's manifesto. Wolffe resurrects the term "Greater Britain," which "was originally used to refer to imperial possessions on a global scale," but is here used "with ironically evocative intent to point up the cultural and political prominence of the concept of 'Britain' in these islands" (p. x). Wolffe possibly overstates the case here, since the phrase itself was used by contemporaries without any trace of irony and unencumbered by more modern conceptions of embarrassment which attach themselves to the British national self-image. However, the book itself successfully avoids the pitfalls of the hindsight that goes with imperial decline and can appear to render such imagined institutions anachronistic.

The first chapter - "Religion and Nationhood in Modern Britain" -sets the scene and outlines the definitions that the book is anxious to work with. Wolffe is eager to look at the meaning of participation but not to adhere

to glib deterministic explanations. For him, "Such participation would mean different things to different people at different times, and it should not be assumed without careful investigation that non-involvement in organized religion implied a lack of personal belief" (p. 3). He also notes that religion became less a matter of adherence to institutions and more a matter of personal conviction. In recognizing the new agenda of social history, he rightly asserts that Marxists are now more ready to concede the power of religion as a motivating factor in individual's structuration of reality and its existence as an independent cultural force. The historiographical question of nationhood has likewise, argues Wolffe, moved debates about religion away from the Thompson/Halevy "British industrialization as trauma" thesis to one that considers the later period, where religion should be viewed in the light of "nationalism in Europe, territorial fragmentation and socio-political upheaval."

Religious stability represented by the Church of England was seen to be an essential part of the British identity that safeguarded its international hegemony. Rather deftly, Wolffe identifies the notion of religious perceptions emanating from national ones through his identification of the Durkheimian analysis of religion as a system of symbols. Such symbols, it is demonstrated, can coalesce around ritual associated with national character and identity such as Trooping the Colours, the opening of Parliament, school speech days, and Christmas lunch.

The use of such symbols invites consideration of "quasi-religion" -rituals and practices that give society its cohesion. At some points this definition has to do a great deal of work, something Wolffe does admit to. Clearly on occasions this can stand in for religion, just as often it acts as an imperceptible extension of it (as in Wolffe's detailed and excellent description of the ritual surrounding Remembrance Day, with its invocation of sacrifice, redemption, and attachment to imperial brotherhood–as well as the desperation of the clergy in trying to bring such diffusive feelings under the umbrella of official Christianity). Indeed, the identification of nationalism with religion is taken a stage further and the two become interchangeable. He suggests that "Nationalism indeed has recently been identified as manifesting all the functional dimensions that can be attributed to religion, namely ritual, myth, experience, ethical implications, doctrine, organization, and material statements in art and architecture" (p. 17).

Wolffe also examines the construction role and purpose of the informal or unofficial religion that is familiar to social historians. Citing in this chapter the example of the Irish who transported turf and sticks across Ireland as a protection against cholera, Wolffe declares that "One person's credulity or superstition could be a central part of another's religion" (pp. 10-11). This example is not as helpful as it might be, because it serves to indicate backwardness and geographical remoteness. The invocations of providentialism on the "British" mainland itself when confronted with cholera perhaps provide a more intriguing example that demonstrates the greater complexity of the "official" versus "unofficial" dichotomy.

Attached to both of the preceding conceptual definitions is a consideration of the meaning of national identity and the religious aspects that gathered around this - "... for most inhabitants of England in the nineteenth century as at the present day, a sense of being simultaneously 'English and British' presented few practical problems." In Scotland and Wales and above all in Ireland, the question of whether to identify primarily with the smaller national entity or with the all-encompassing 'British' state was a much more acute and divisive one. Indeed on occasions it could clash stridently. Wolffe quotes the anti-Catholic leader Hugh McNeile -"we cannot allow our spirituality as Christians entirely to supersede our patriotism as Britons" - indicating how far the growing religion of nationalism had progressed during this period (p. 18).

A chapter on the formation of Victorian religion presents an account of the rise of the various denominations and their relative status. However, to demonstrate the developments unique to the age, Wolffe examines Evangelicalism and Catholicism as the two most dynamic trends within official Christianity. Whilst pursuing this argument he is always careful to reiterate the established history of religion during the period. Similarly, the accounts contain helpful definitions, which are useful to the student as well as reminding the established scholar of the ground being covered. In particular the definition of evangelicalism as "a mode of thinking and acting" is particularly useful as a means of dissuading scholars from a narrow sectarian/institutional focus in their study of this phenomenon. The verdict on evangelicalism is that it was "... a dynamic and broadly based religious force, combining spiritual energy, institutional diversity and cultural sensitivity. Arguably it was now passing the peak of its influence, but its impact on the lasting framework of British and Irish religious and social life was unmistakable" (p. 30).

Wolffe suggests that Catholicism in urban Britain owed a great deal to the need to find a focus for commu-

nal identities - an analysis that has recently been qualified by Stephen Fielding. Whilst Wolffe's geography of Catholicism is generally sound, his suggestion that there were hardly any Catholics in the southwest is perhaps an overstatement (p. 31). Catholicism was seen as a fundamental challenge to the sanctity of the British state - an impression enhanced by the increasing identification of Catholicism with the Irish. The perception of a revived more dangerous and vibrant Catholicism (the so-called Second Spring) during the first half of the nineteenth century should be considered a parallel development to the evangelical revival - a suggestion that reinforces the "thinking and acting" analysis. Catholicism believed it could carry all before it, and this was itself a spur to evangelical Protestants to redouble their efforts.

Nonetheless Catholicism and Evangelicalism had much in common, both providing "a powerful stimulus to the defining and strengthening of community, both at a local and national level." Evangelicalism contributed to the articulation of Scottish and Welsh identities which sought to superimpose themselves over the "British" identity (p. 42). This resistance was against the notion of an anglicized established church in partnership with an anglicized civil society, which sought to level out national differences at the Celtic fringe. The health of an increasingly "British" society was seen as dependent on securing its Protestant settlement. Wolffe quotes the Duke of Newcastle as indicative of hysterical concern that constitutional change was emphatically tied up with the Act of Emancipation. This is contrasted with the views thirty years later of Arnold, who believed that the established church should be doctrinally flexible enough to encompass all the English, allowing church to seamlessly merge with state.

Consideration of the idea of official religion brings into stark relief the difference between the aspirations of clergy and hierarchy in all denominations of Victorian religion and their potential congregations. As Wolffe suggests, "In evaluating the role of organized religion in local communities it is important to recognize the implications of the claims of the Church of England (in Wales and Ireland as well as England), the Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland to be truly national churches with a role in every community in the country. The fact that at times such claims looked very unrealistic did not stop them being made" (p. 53). However, there was a national diversity in this, since Scotland, for example, showed a higher level of participation in church government by lay members than in England–leading to this facet alone being a distinctive badge of Scottish identity. Similarly, the absence of a lay parliament equally served to invest the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland with localized national identity.

Whilst established denominations did their best to adapt to the changing climate of Victorian Britain, the newer religious bodies that were direct products of the nineteenth century found problems in penetrating communities where social structures already existed. In assessing the success or failure of official religion, the book is still prepared to use the religious census of 1851 as a useful indicator of religious adherence, despite its inherent problems . When taken together with other sources, Wolffe argues, it suggests that religious adherence throughout Britain as a whole remained relatively constant between the late Victorian period and the Second World War. When subdivided, it appears that Scottish adherence even rose. Ireland, however, is an extreme example of official religion linked with social structure and identity. Catholics were less numerous in the nineteenth century due to the effects of the post-famine social structure. Ireland's religious typography, as the twentieth century progressed, has come to resemble the political division between the north and the Free State. Wolffe concludes that official religion was strongest numerically when it was linked into a wider system of cultural values.

The discussion of "unofficial" religion is seen less as a competitive element working against official "religion" and more as a uniquely constructed mentality that accepted or rejected facets of the religious life as they appeared to the individual - "The widespread indifference that surrounded the institutional churches is best understood not so much as a rejection of religion in the broadest sense, but as a loss of familiar points of reference and a reluctance to identify with unfamiliar structures, especially when these were associated with varying degrees of social exclusiveness" (p. 83). The conventional churches' response to this wave of unofficial religion was to pour resources into neighbourhoods to counteract the tendency.

Whilst the dramatic missionary work of Moody and Sankey and the Catholic Redemptorists tends to grab the headlines, there was a more widespread lay ethic of involvement in lower key missionary work such as tract distribution and the relief of more material distress. This was backed up by burgeoning educational and leisure opportunities associated with religious institutions, which became such a central part of the mid-late Victorian community throughout Britain. Taking official and unofficial religion together, Wolffe estimates that by 1900 the British people were closer to Christian orthodoxy then

they had been in their history. Whilst not really in the scope of the work, Wolffe's dismissal of secularism as not motivating whole communities is in danger of undermining the notion of "unofficial" religion he has established. This relies on the individual's interaction with spirituality and the environment to produce multifarious practices that come under the umbrella of religion. Moreover, one of Wolffe's leading conclusions is that the twentieth century has seen religion develop manifestly away from a communal dimension yet remain recognizably intact.

The discussion under the title "Religion and Nationhood in 1850" analyzes the competing tendencies that served to draw together a "British" identity which at times competed with, and at times co-existed with, a devolved national one. Occasionally individual actions could be a rejection of the former and an embrace of the latter. Thus Chalmers' leadership of the Scottish Disruption becomes both a nationalist protest against an anglicized church which was abusing its patronage and "an endeavour to create a true, godly commonwealth... [which] had the potential to feed into cultural currents that flowed well beyond the specific evangelical context enunciated by Chalmers" (p. 102). However, the coalition between religious and cultural/national concerns could not be taken for granted, and Wolffe usefully reminds us that the tension between them led to a breach between Young Irelanders and the Catholic Church in the 1840s over the precise nature of the Home Rule settlement.

The Disruption, the Monster meetings to campaign for Home Rule, and the parliamentary investigation of Welsh education are skillfully intertwined through narrative to assess the state of religion in 1850 in the Celtic fringe nations and their respective relationships with the centre. Wolffe successfully paints a picture of these peripheries asserting religion as a core component of identities manifestly at odds with the centre, which sought to speak and legislate for these areas. He further argues that such differences were submerged in a popular Protestantism that was regularly fed by Catholic scares of one kind or another - such as the restoration of the English hierarchy in 1850. Whilst this is convincing, Wolffe perhaps does not do enough to distinguish between the rhetoric of the pulpit and the rhetoric of the street.

In his consideration of the disestablishment question, Wolffe rightly reminds readers that a considerable leap of imagination is required to understand the gripping importance of disestablishment as an issue to contemporaries. Three periods of change in the relationship between religion and politics are suggested - the reform period of the 1820s followed by a generation during which little change took place, and lastly a period of renewed reform from the 1860s, during which church rates were abolished, the Irish Church disestablished, and the first attempts to remove education from religious control were instituted. Nonconformists saw themselves as leveling down the Church of England rather than seeking to gain state money for themselves. This stance reached its zenith in the creation of the Liberal conscience under Gladstone and the moralism that spilled over from his Midlothian campaign. This however is juxtaposed with a close examination of the Primrose League and its connection of Empire and Sovereign to "Religion...of a generalized kind," which, Wolffe suggests, even appealed over the heads of Nonconformists to a significant Catholic minority. At a cultural level, though, Nonconformists, suggests Wolffe, were able to draw upon the legacy of Puritanism that encompassed Bunyan and forbearance. This, however, was in a process of dissolution in the political sphere as a result of Gladstone's death. The connection between socialism and politics is graphically illustrated by a quote from Stanley Baldwin suggesting that the Labour Party in 1926 contained "many men who fifty years ago would inevitably have gone into the Christian ministry." However, Wolffe's assertion that Morris is a good example of the religion of socialism needs considerable qualification, since it overstates the religious aspect of the term.

In considering the political nature of religion in Ireland, the book warns against polarizing the issues with the benefit of hindsight. The two sides of the argument were less homogenous than they have been painted, their own perceptions of the connection between religion and politics largely unresolved, and their acceptance of majority or minority status by no means a foregone conclusion. It was the work of Pearce, who transformed Irish nationalism into a quasi-religion, that convinced laity and clergy alike of the connection between religion and politics in an Irish nationalist context. This was a success story, built upon the advantages conferred by Catholic spirituality, whereas the connection made in the rest of the Celtic fringe was considerably less triumphant -"Welsh nationalism was transient because it lacked the same enduring quasi-religious elements which could protect it from the defection and decline of official religion: and Scottish nationalism was feeble because it failed to become religious in any effective way" (p. 153).

"Culture and Belief" is an attempt to decipher religious trends depicted in architecture and other visual arts. Whilst this provides useful examples for Wolffe's thesis, it also makes important points about

the role of these artifacts in religious thought and practice. Catholics and Anglo-Catholics saw particular significance in architecture and music as vehicles for the support and development of Christian worship. Similarly, our contemporary lack of acquaintanceship with the didactic religious novel, it is argued, results from its spectacular eclipse in the mind of the public, which has obliterated an earlier critical and popular acceptance.

The discussion of the influence of religious culture is convincing and shows the attachment to the religious/imperial nexus through Arnold and Kipling with the process of dilution characterized by Rupert Brooke, Edward Elgar, and T.S. Eliot. His commentary on the Protestant Yeats' sentimental attachment to the notion of a Catholic Ireland is a graphic depiction of how closely religion and nationalism identified at a cultural level. However, the twentieth-century recourse to a Christian world order was the product of the psychological damage wrought by the First World War. John Buchan, a strident imperialist in his younger days, became just such a devotee in the years leading up to his death. G.K. Chesterton, on the other hand, saw an eventual commitment to Roman Catholicism as a means of tempering the spirit of imperialism.

In describing the secularization of culture since 1945, Wolffe suggests that Matthew Arnold's "shoreline of the Continent of Faith" had retreated to form a large island. Whilst making the point succinctly, the poem in fact speaks of a "sea of faith" -perhaps the creation of navigable channels between rocky outcrops would be a more faithful metaphor.

The discussion of the Empire, war, and remembrance is perhaps one of the most engaging parts of the book and is also one the areas most recently colonized by scholars of religion and mentality. The idea that the Empire was a providential gift was a strong one and the duty to be a "Christian soldier" was embodied in, among others, the person of General Gordon and the panoply of memorials and commemorations that recalled a chivalric past. Similarly, the duality of Christianity and Empire is graphically demonstrated by the popularity of Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* in imperial territories. Wolffe asserts that religion and empire fused in the last quarter of the nineteenth century - a state of affairs that had turned the Nonconformists from sceptics to enthusiastic advocates of all things imperial. The leaching away of this certainty of Britain's sacred imperial mission is portrayed through the attitudes engendered by the two world wars; the First a comparatively clear-cut struggle between nationalistically conceived "Christ and Odin," the Second a wider struggle between two conflicting principles that encompassed all mankind. Even this became uncertain in the world after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which intimated portents of the apocalypse.

Whilst admitting religion and religious participation has declined measurably, Wolffe is reticent about the concept of secularization. He suggests that the definition of religion that such theories tend to adopt is too simplistic because it denies the equal legitimacy of "official," "unofficial," and "quasi-religion." Similarly, for Wolffe this introduces an artificial dichotomy between the sacred and the secular that his book is a serious attempt to dispel. In the light of this he prefers the phrase "ways of being religious" or shifts in the relative strength of the three types of religion -"The trend during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was for the dominant religious tone of Britain to change from an ethos of doctrinally hard edged and tightly disciplined churches to a more diffuse and varied shifting kaleidoscope of beliefs."

To emphasize the poverty of the secularization as all or nothing process, Wolfe finally suggests an only partly tongue-in-cheek analysis of the shifting tide of belief that conveys meaningful change in belief if not adherence and practice. "Heaven became an idealized recreation of the Victorian family; hell changed from a place of very literal fire and torture to a kind of negative apotheosis of English suburbia on a wet February afternoon" (p. 255).

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