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Charity R. Carney. *Ministers and Masters: Methodism, Manhood, and Honor in the Old South.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011. 216 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-3886-1; ISBN 978-0-8071-3888-5; ISBN 978-0-8071-3887-8; ISBN 978-0-8071-3889-2.

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Irons on Carney, *Ministers and Masters*

Methodist clergy in the antebellum South, Charity Carney argues in *Ministers and Masters*, sought creative ways to reconcile the imperatives of southern honor culture with their spiritual values. Avoiding the language of capitulation used by some influential historians, such as Donald Mathews and Christine Heyrman, Carney emphasizes instead the ministers' continued attempts to be loyal to the Gospel as they understood it even as they retreated on some ethical questions. More significantly, she argues that these men formed a new masculine ideal by trying to keep alive the tension between spiritual egalitarianism and the South's social hierarchies. As she puts it, "Stuck between two masters–southern society and the Church–Methodist ministers crafted their own definition of manhood that would save both their souls and their reputations" (p. 37). In chapters on church governance, ministers' families, children, and slavery, she documents ministers' attempts to have it both ways–to deliver the liberating power of the Gospel while protecting their privileged status as white men in a slaveholding society.

Scholars have argued for decades both about how countercultural the first white southern evangelicals actually were and about whether and how they "made peace" with the South's overlapping hierarchies of race, class, and gender. Mathews and Heyrman, for example, have depicted early white evangelicals wrecking their egalitarianism on the shoals of entrenched white male privilege.[1] In a more subtle formulation, John B. Boles has explained that white southern evangelicals never embraced slavery as a positive good but stopped protesting against it in order to attract more converts.[2] Others, including Douglas Ambrose and Jewel Spangler as well as this reviewer, have posited that early white evangelicals were never as committed to antislavery as some have imagined–and that the work of "accommodation" was therefore not as difficult.[3] Carney joins Janet Lindeman, Beth Barton Schweiger, Robert Elder, and others who have recently intervened in these longstanding debates by asking in a more pointed way how white southerners' gender may have influenced their efforts to create new evangelical identities.[4]

Carney evaluates changing southern ideas about manhood and honor primarily through an examination of Methodist newspapers, published sermons, and pamphlets, though she also consults some published personal papers and records from the General Conferences. She eschews church records, since her argument centers "less on the reality of ministers' situations and more on the ideas that bound these men to each other and to their congregations" (p. 9). Randolph Scully's work is a reminder of how useful church records can be in unraveling how southern churchgoers treated one another differently based on their relative positions in society, so this is somewhat of a missed opportunity.[5] Moreover, as Carney acknowledges in reference to Bishop Joshua Soule, a northern transplant and one of her key informants, when one abstracts voices from their contexts it can be difficult to sort out what is "southern" and what is simply "conservative" about the ideas (pp. 38-41). Several minor factual inaccuracies compound this problem.[6] On the other hand, Methodist congregational records are more difficult to track down than those of Baptist or Presbyterian churches, and the wide readership of the sources Carney privileges makes them well suited to her focus

on defining and redefining masculinity, which depended upon public performance.

The most exciting fruit of Carney's close attention to southern Methodist ideas about masculinity is her reevaluation of the schism in 1844-46. Early apologists for the northern and southern branches of the church filled volumes with their discussions of the procedural failings of the other party and lambasted one another for their positions vis-à-vis slavery. Subsequent scholars have generally followed suit, emphasizing either the moral conflict over slavery or the use of churches as a venue to fight over the increasingly politicized issue. Carney, on the hand, suggests that southern Methodist ministers had developed a new conception of manhood, which in turn led them to promote "a different vision of church structure that contributed to their ultimate separation from the national church" (p. 42). "Methodist ministers attempted to recreate the family model within the church setting," she argues, "placing themselves at the head of the spiritual household and demanding obedience from their subordinates (including church members and younger ministers)" (p. 44).

Southern Methodist ministers, Carney provocatively suggests, were willing to fight so tenaciously to defend their spiritual authority as male heads of the spiritual family of the church precisely because they "could not live up to other patriarchal expectations that southern society at large placed on average white men" (p. 64). Cast in this light, Southerners' defense of Bishop James O. Andrew at the General Conference of 1844 becomes something more than a bid to protect slavery. It was a desperate attempt by southern ministers to force their northern colleagues to acknowledge the authority of the southern patriarch par excellence–Bishop Andrew. With secession and the formation in 1846 of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS), Carney maintains, "ministers in the region made a deliberate effort to contain threats to episcopal authority and to create a church government that supported strong patriarchs as well as slavery" (p. 55). While Carney acknowledges countercurrents among Southern Methodist ministers, including the presence of many who clung so tightly to a competing "legacy of denominational democracy and egalitarianism" that they supported the Methodist Protestant Church in 1828, her suggestion that most ministers in the South favored episcopal hierarchy is compelling (pp. 49, 53). A key bit of evidence is the fact that ministers in the MECS gave their bishops a veto over their General Conference in 1854, demonstrating their preference for more hierarchy than had existed in the united church.

Chapters on ministers' families, on children, and on slavery do not cover as much new ground. In each instance, Carney illustrates ways in which clergy used rhetoric that was egalitarian to raise up wives, children, and enslaved people, though they ultimately left intact existing hierarchies. The key to this apparent contradiction is the old truism, one that Carney herself acknowledges, that both evangelicals and even southern lawmakers distinguished between temporal and spiritual empowerment. In reference to slavery, Carney notes that "Methodist stories that granted slaves a sense of religious authority made certain to separate the temporal relationship between master and slave from the spiritual relationship" (p. 127). This crucial distinction between temporal and spiritual empowerment was not a nineteenth-century invention. The apostle Paul laid down this general principle in his exhortation for each person, including those enslaved, to "abide in the same calling wherein he was called," a position which white slaveholders promptly adopted in order to protect their enslaved property against conversions.[7]

In the end, Carney's greatest contribution may be her reminder of the "potential for diverse gender constructions in a constricted society" (p. 139). When historians seek the meaning of evangelicalism among southern whites, for example, they should be prepared to find variegated responses–including those who found their old ways of life incompatible with life as a converted believer, those who found sanction for nearly every element of their worldview, and those–like Methodist ministers–who fashioned their own way.

Notes

[1]. Donald G. Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), and *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).

[2]. John B. Boles, "The Southern Way of Religion," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 75, no. 2 (1999): 241.

[3]. Douglas Ambrose, "Of Stations and Relations: Proslavery Christianity in Early National Virginia," in *Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery*, ed. John R. McKivigan and Mitchell Snay (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 35-67; Jewel L. Spangler, "Proslavery Presbyterians: Virginia's Conservative Dissenters in the Age of Revolution," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 78, no. 2 (2000): 111-24; and Charles F. Irons, *The Origins*

of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). Note also that several scholars, none more prominently than Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, have largely sidestepped this entire debate and argued that white southerners within and without evangelical churches consistently understood their society to be founded upon scripturally based hierarchies. *Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[4]. Janet Moore Lindman, "Acting the Manly Christian: White Evangelical Masculinity in Revolutionary Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 57, no. 2 (2000): 393-416; Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Robert Elder, "A Twice Sacred Circle: Women, Evangelicalism, and Honor in the Deep South, 1784-1860," *Journal of Southern History* 78, no. 3 (2012): 574-614. There are powerful sections on gender identity in more synthetic treatments as well. See especially Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), chapters 4 and 6, which Carney does not engage; and Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), passim but esp. chapters 5 and 7, which Carney only briefly addresses.

[5]. Randolph Ferguson Scully, *Religion and the Making of Nat Turner's Virginia: Baptist Community and Conflict, 1740-1840* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), esp. chapter 4.

[6]. For example, Carney repeatedly misidentifies Georgia native James O. Andrew as a "slaveholder from Virginia" (cf. pp. 96, 105) before returning him to Georgia; incorrectly identifies Henry Evans as "a black man from Fayetteville, Georgia" (p. 143, n. 9), though he is back in North Carolina by p. 148 (n. 41); and misdates the James O'Kelly Schism twice (different incorrect dates) on p. 150 (n. 9 and n. 19).

[7]. 1 Corinthians 7:20 (KJV); cf. also the 1667 Virginia statute insisting that conversion did not necessitate manumission.

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