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Following her award-winning debut monograph, *Religion and Profit: Moravians in Early America* (2009), Katherine Carté (Southern Methodist University) tackles the thorny topic of religion in the era of the American Revolution in her most recent book. While it is no small endeavor to produce a compelling contribution to a body of literature as well studied as the American Revolution, it is all the more difficult to provide a unique interpretive synthesis for the field. Yet that is what Carté accomplishes with *Religion and the American Revolution*.

Eschewing a transatlantic lens, or one of American nationalism, or religious conflict, or even religious thought/belief, Carté’s fresh take on the question of religion and the American Revolution is grounded in her idea of imperial protestantism, which was “the system of government privilege, protestant institutions, and social networks that made Britain's empire and its religion protestant” (p. 5). Using this interpretative framework, she argues that the “American Revolution severed those connections among protestants that had been nurtured and built across Britain's eighteenth-century empire. It also transformed the system of denominations that had organized protestants for nearly a century, the relationships that linked Anglo-American religious leaders, and the way that religious communities on both sides of the Atlantic related to their governments” (p. 3). In short, the revolutionary environments that led to the emergence of religious tolerance and freedom in both the United States and Great Britain during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are best understood through the context of imperial protestantism.

The argument of *Religion and the American Revolution* is developed through eight body chapters that proceed, for the most part, chronologically. The first few chapters clearly lay out the characteristics, component churches and organizations, and processes of imperial protestantism as it was developed in Great Britain from the Glorious Revolution to the cusp of the American Revolution. The well-known events and tensions of the colonial era, such as the trial of Francis Makemie, the formation of the NEC (New England Company), and the bishopric crisis, largely fit well within the mixed establishment of the British Empire proposed by Carté. The same is true for the following pair of chapters that collectively examine processes of the period between 1773 and 1776—the Boston Tea Party, the Quebec Act, and fast days get special attention—which challenged and finally rent asunder, at least rhetorically, the “scaffolding” of imperial protestantism that had been
eighty years in the making. The War of American Independence, covered in chapters 5 and 6, Carté contends, made the rhetorical dissolution of imperial protestantism a reality. Not only did the war sever these ties, but the experiences during the conflict also altered the nature of the now separate protestant communities. Chief among these changes, addressed in the final set of chapters, was the embrace of legal plurality. While the transition from religious tolerance to religious freedom proceeded at different paces in America and the remaining British Empire—illustrated well by the Gordon Riots and the ratification of the First Amendment—Carté argues that “on both sides of the Atlantic, the connections of imperial protestantism, and the confessional age they had grown out of, were gone” (p. 375). The American Revolution had redefined for both groups the relationship between churches and the state just in time for the nascent nineteenth century.

As with any broad interpretative framework, there are events and processes that evade easy inclusion. The notion, for instance, that only imperial protestantism offers a satisfactory explanation for the questions of how and why American protestant leaders were able to accept the aid of Catholic France and Spain during the war is a good example. Recent scholarship has contended—relying on a lens of religious thought/beliefs—that key to understanding this paradoxical union was the rekindled protestant hope of Christian unity sparked by colonial newspaper reports of Jesuit suppression throughout Catholic Europe. In this instance, as in others, the canvas of protestant imperialism does not provide a clearly better explanation than other interpretative approaches. Even so, the existence of such outliers should not detract from the significance of Carté’s work, as far more often than not imperial protestantism persuades.

Religion and the American Revolution will, no doubt, shape the historical discourse of the field moving forward. While this is largely the result of Carté’s meticulous and compelling argument, the breadth and depth of her scholarship, as found in the book’s notes, will also serve as a boon to any student of the American revolutionary era. Not only does she marshal an exemplarily diverse range of primary sources in the notes, but she also provides an impressively thorough introduction to the literature and the ongoing discussions of the field. From cover to cover, Carté and the Omohundro Institute are to be commended for carefully crafting such a helpful tool for both new and established historians. In the end, Religion and the American Revolution proves to be both an important and practical book that will find an essential place in the libraries of American revolutionary scholars the world over.
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