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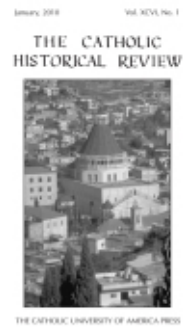
*Religion in American Politics: A Short History* (review)

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their faith and making it relevant to their lives as Americans. Thus, readers are not left with a monolithic picture, but a kaleidoscopic impression that captures a church and its people in constant motion.

The appendix of sixty page-length biographical essays represents a useful primer. Readers will find entries on Jacques Marquette, John Carroll, Mathew Carey, Dorothy Day, and Joseph Bernardin. But they will also find information on figures like Catherine Tekakwitha, the Mohawk convert to Catholicism; Mary Elizabeth Lange, the Haitian-born founder of the Oblate Sisters of Providence; James Walsh, who founded the Maryknoll Fathers; and Gustave Weigel, the Jesuit who commenced the practice of formal ecumenical dialogue with American Protestants. Taken together, these essays alone provide a nice introduction to more than 500 years of history. Above all, the global connections of these figures underscore the way in which American Catholicism was never simply an American phenomenon, but always an international one.

Carey's vast knowledge and his ability to bring a scattered array of details into a coherent narrative will impress any reader. This book is recommended for anyone seeking a richly detailed but crisp study of American Catholicism.

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JAMES P. MCCARTIN

*Religion in American Politics: A Short History.* By Frank Lambert. (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2008. Pp. x, 294. \$24.95. ISBN 978-0-691-12833-7.)

With the advent of the culture wars and continuing controversy over issues such as abortion, stem-cell research, and same-sex marriage, the role of religion in American politics has lately attracted the attention of scholars, journalists, and many other interested observers. Analyses of public opinion and voting behavior reveal that religious characteristics have become one of the most powerful predictors of individuals' political decision-making in recent elections. Lambert's volume, *Religion in American Politics: A Short History*, effectively puts these contemporary developments into historical context and provides readers with valuable perspective on the origins and development of today's religiously-based political conflict.

The book is organized chronologically, beginning "at the founding of the republic with the question of the optimal role of religion in American public life" and ending "in the twenty-first century with moral questions debated by the Religious Right and the Religious Left" (pp. 10-11). Along the way, Lambert provides insightful descriptions of a variety of controversies, including debates over the propriety of mail delivery on Sundays, religiously-based battles over science, and the modernist/fundamentalist controversy. The book focuses primarily on conflicts among Christians and especially on those

involving Protestants, reflecting “the historical predominance of Protestants in the nation’s religious heritage” (p. 13). In tracing religious conflicts in American politics over two centuries, Lambert makes two main arguments: first, “that religious coalitions seek by political means what the Constitution prohibits, namely, a national religious establishment, or, more specifically, a Christian civil religion”; and second, that “religion in American politics is contested” (pp. 5, 6). By this, he means that “any religious group’s attempt to represent the nation’s religious heritage or claim to be its moral conscience is sure to be met with opposition from other religious groups as well as from nonreligious parties” (p. 6).

Lambert’s prose is easy to read, and this book will appeal to both academic and nonacademic audiences. Each chapter provides a wealth of information about the major players involved in various disputes at different points in time without becoming bogged down in too much detail. The book clearly demonstrates that despite claims to the contrary from commentators across the political spectrum, the United States has always been a religiously diverse polity characterized by important disagreements about religious matters. Lambert’s description of historical religious conflict provides the contemporary reader with valuable context for understanding today’s contentious debates.

Organizing the volume chronologically makes it easy for the reader to follow. However, even though each chapter traces events and controversies that occurred at successively later moments in time, there are instances where reference is made to people or events from different periods, which sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish between developments occurring in the period under discussion, on the one hand, versus historical antecedents and future consequences on the other. For instance, in nine pages dedicated to discussion of “Natural Selection versus Providential Design,” discussion ranges from the influence of eighteenth-century figures such as Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin, to the mid-nineteenth century writings of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., to the origins and development of Bible colleges in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Whereas so much of the volume is eminently useful in helping the reader to understand the specifics of religiously-based conflict at various discrete moments in time, some sections discuss events and developments from such a wide variety of time periods that it can be difficult to discern exactly how they fit together.

Despite this, *Religion in American Politics* provides a thorough description and discussion of the roots and development of many of the divisions that continue to characterize our own day, and as such will be a valuable addition to the library of anyone seeking a deeper understanding of the relationship between religion and politics in the United States.