Christians, the idea that Christianity in India was, in a major sense, "imported" or "alien" or "colonial" is open to question.

The term "inculturation" itself is not clearly defined. Is inculturation merely some sort of autonomous changing of an already existing culture—a special kind of cultural hybridity—constructed, in varying degrees, for different Indian Christian communities by themselves? Is it an inevitable, somewhat mindless or spontaneous process that is beyond human control? Or is it an ecclesiastical policy that is to be implemented by church authorities and worldwide ecumenical institutions? Apparently, the latter definition seems favored; and, apparently, this is a good thing. Even so, does not inculturation-as-policy contradict and, indeed, scorn the capacity of Indian Christians to shape their own faith and their own rituals of worship? Inculturation coming out of decisions and discussions of the World Council of Churches, Vatican II, and Lambeth Conferences seems little more than another futile importation, if not a neo-colonial imposition. Christianity in India has always been, predominantly and profoundly, Indian. Books like this notwithstanding, its manifold cultures seem quite likely to remain so.

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American Catholics in the Protestant Imagination: Rethinking the Academic Study of Religion. By **Michael P. Carroll**. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. xx + 221 pp. $49.95 cloth.

This book is a great example of the discoveries that can be made when scholars refuse to be confined by the boundaries of their disciplines. Michael P. Carroll is a professor of sociology at the University of Western Ontario who has made a career out of studying the past. Perhaps it is because his training is *not* in the field of history that he is able to recognize and challenge the common narratives that many historians—who worked so hard to master these narratives when studying for their comprehensive exams—take for granted in their work.

In this book, Carroll sets his sights on the "consensus" and "degradation" narratives that have dominated the historiography on American religion. He shows how these narratives have "privileged Protestantism" by assuming that the Protestant approach to God is the natural progression of religious belief, and that Protestantism is more fitted to the American cultural landscape than other religious beliefs (151). More important, though, Carroll shows how scholars of American Catholicism have, themselves, been influenced by these

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narratives, accepting "claims that have little or no empirical support" and ignoring "clues that point to interpretations of the American Catholic experience that allow for less passivity and more creativity" than the prevailing historiography suggests (ix).

To make his argument, Carroll points to a number of prominent and pervasive assumptions in the scholarship on American religion. He notes the tendency among historians to treat the so-called "Scots-Irish" who settled the southern and frontier regions of the British colonies as less "Irish"—but more "American"—than their Catholic countrymen. This tendency, Carroll insists, has denied historians the opportunity to explore "the Irish contribution to the rise of evangelical Christianity in America" (2). Not only that, but Carroll tells us that tendency has also bolstered the notion that the "Irish" story in America is an exclusively Catholic one. This, in turn, has encouraged historians to assume that the Irish came to America "strongly attached to Catholicism"—even when the historians' own research suggests otherwise (32).

It is one of the great strengths of Carroll's argument that he is able to use the data marshaled out by historians themselves to show the extent to which they have been blinded by the narratives that dominate their field. In point of fact, the impoverished Irish peasants who came to the United States during the famine period were *not* particularly devout, and Carroll is able to point to a number of key studies of nineteenth-century Irish immigration to prove this. Yet the scholars who have created and used these studies "continue to suggest that post-Famine Irish American religiosity was rooted in Ireland's devotional revolution," insisting that the centralized, hierarchical character of Irish American Catholicism must be seen as an extension of the ultramontanist tradition nurtured and embraced by financially stable, fiercely nationalistic farmers in nineteenth-century Ireland who did not leave their homeland (34). Ignored, then, is the reality that Irish peasants had to have become devout *after* they arrived in America—and that Irish American religiosity, which came to define the ideal of "good Catholicism" in the United States, was rooted not in Ireland, but in immigrants' "experiences in America" (35).

The reason historians have tended to place the roots of Irish-American Catholicism in the Old World, Carroll tells us, is that the story fits nicely with a "longstanding and continuing intellectual tradition" in the scholarly study of American religion that sees Catholicism as primitive, unevolved, permanently ethnic, and inherently non-American (149). This view of the Catholic mindset as something primitive, or "premodern," has led members of his own discipline, according to Carroll, to exaggerate the tendency of Hispanic Catholics to convert to pentecostalism (147). In other chapters of the book, Carroll describes how a "historiographical predisposition to see most variants of American Catholicism as having emerged in a foreign location" has led to misunderstandings about Italian and Cajun Catholics and

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the extent to which their faith was shaped by their American experiences (144). What is ironic about these misunderstandings is that the scholars who hold them are often practicing Catholics—the American descendants of the Irish, Italian, and Cajun immigrants being misunderstood. Such is the power of the "Protestant imagination" under which these scholars were trained.

But if it is true that Irish immigrants came to embrace a hierarchical approach to Catholicism—or that Italian immigrants started organizing cults around regional Madonnas—as a consequence of their American experiences, the question remains: How did these experiences lead to such developments? On this front, Carroll's book is a bit weak. Although the explanations he offers—that a disciplined faith meshed nicely with the middle-class values Irish domestic servants were expected to uphold, and that festas and Madonna cults valorized Italian identity at a time when eastern Europeans were being demonized by nativist politicians—do make sense, Carroll presents little historical evidence to substantiate his claims. Indeed, at times, his arguments seem to mirror those of the historians whom he insists "felt no obligation to present any evidence in support of their contentions" (31). Still, it is not really the purpose of this book to answer the question of how, exactly, American experiences shaped Catholic religious identity, and Carroll would have done well to present his theories as just that—theories in desperate need of some budding historian's attention. As it stands, Carroll has made an important contribution to the study of American religion simply by alerting us all to the reality that "the academic literature on American religion is pervaded by biases and metanarratives which in one way or the other derive from a Protestant imagination" (186).

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Southern Missions: The Religion of the American South in Global Perspective. By **Charles Reagan Wilson**. Edmondson Historical Lecture Series 29. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006. vi + 54 pp. $13.95 paper.

In March 2006 Charles Reagan Wilson, noted historian and specialist in Southern studies, delivered the twenty-eighth lecture for the Edmondson Historical Lectures Series at Baylor University. Actually, there were two lectures that have been published under the title *Southern Missions: The Religion of the American South in Global Perspective*. The guiding thesis of this set of lectures is that

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