

by sending in the Inspector General of Insane Asylums and president of the *Société medico-psychologique*, much as a medieval ruler might have summoned the Inquisition to root out rural heresy.

Davies makes it clear that his interesting book is not a critique of psychiatry, but is 'primarily a social history of ideas about the supernatural across society through the prism of medical history and its archives' (p. 9). That notwithstanding, the ghost of Foucault, if I may invoke the supernatural, does still haunt these pages with its warnings that the role of the asylum was to categorise and discipline. Indeed, such thinking, and the ideological relativism of the current book, could be seen in the light of the 'anti-psychiatric movement' of the 1960s (p. 53) since the belief systems of the doctors at times appear as difficult and oppressive as those of their patients. While the psychiatric and medical source material is explored in often minute detail, broader distinctions between religion, spirituality, belief, faith and superstition could benefit from a bit more consideration. Likewise, the episodes of interesting discussion of witches and hysteria could have been put in a broader context of the male domination of what was deemed to be expertise. The volume closes with some intriguing thoughts on twenty-first-century conspiracy theories by asking whether those with such beliefs might have been held to be insane in the past. It is the widespread persistence of the irrational that leads Davies to conclude that the giant attempt *via* the asylum system to 'foster the right sort of faith' was a failure both in terms of medicine and of the imagination (p. 278).

KEELE UNIVERSITY

DOMINIC JANES

Protestant liberty. Religion and the making of Canadian Liberalism, 1828–1878. By James M. Forbes. Pp. xiv + 280. (McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion.) Montreal & Kingston–London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022. £27.50 (paper). 978 0 2280 1071 5

JEH (75) 2024; doi:10.1017/S0022046924000502

Between 1828 and 1878 two visions of religious liberty competed for dominance in Canadian politics. That is the central argument of James M. Forbes's thoroughly-researched, briskly-paced and elegantly-narrated study of religion's influence on the development of the Canadian state, especially in Upper Canada (much of modern-day Ontario). Proponents of one vision, which Forbes labels 'Protestant liberty', presumed that 'Upper Canada would be free only as long as it remained Protestant' and worked to keep it so, while advocates of the second ideal, 'neutral liberty', sought to 'minimize the place of religion and culture within political discourse' (p. 6).

Over the course of five chapters, Forbes traces the process by which neutral liberty came to supplant Protestant liberty as the guiding ideal of liberal politics in Ontario. The first chapter explores the origins of the liberal-reform effort in Upper Canada. The movement drew its support primarily from dissenting Protestant Churches in the Evangelical tradition, and it targeted Anglican institutions. A key element of the dissenters' worldview, Forbes notes, was their conviction that an established Church was inimical to religious vitality. They believed that 'state neutrality towards churches would enable a more genuinely Christian

society' because people, 'if left to their own devices on an even playing field, would voluntarily support the churches that best served their spiritual needs' (p. 41). Chapter ii considers how opposition to the Anglican establishment morphed into critiques of Roman Catholicism following Upper Canada's legislative union with Lower Canada (Quebec) and increased Irish immigration. While moderate liberal leaders supported concessions to Catholics, a new political faction, the Clear Grits, held fast to Protestant liberty's insistence 'that a free society affirm Protestant *culture*' (p. 101). After chronicling this emerging split in the Liberal party in chapter iii, Forbes examines its consequences in the book's final two chapters. Chapter iv reinterprets the Confederation of Canada not as a project of political unity but one of religious disunity. By allowing 'provincial autonomy' in matters of religion, Upper Canada's leaders could continue 'building on their notions of Protestant liberty' by imbuing 'their new dominion' over 'the non-Christian lands of the northwest' with 'a sense of spiritual purpose' (p. 138). Yet, circumstances intervened in this plan, which is the subject of the fifth chapter. Liberal party leaders in Upper Canada found that they needed Catholic votes to remain in power, prompting a strategic decision to adopt the policy of neutral liberty and shift their emphasis from cultural issues to economic ones.

As a study of Canadian history, there is much to commend *Protestant liberty*, especially Forbes's arguments about the pivotal role of dissenting Protestant thought in the nation's early politics. The book's most significant contribution, however, is the broader set of implications it raises about concepts like liberalism and religious liberty. Forbes's study offers an important reminder that religious liberty is a term that eludes a single, universal definition and has often had competing meanings. This is an argument made about religious liberty in the United States in works such as David Sehat's *The myth of American religious freedom*, and it is important in the Canadian context as well. One influential definition of the concept was that employed by many of Forbes's subjects: 'the separation of church and state' that rejected established Churches accompanied by an equally emphatic repudiation of 'societal blindness towards religion' that neutral liberty demanded (p. 101). Forbes persuasively documents the popularity of this perspective in nineteenth-century Canada, highlighting the important historical reality that demands for religious liberty have not been synonymous with calls for the secularisation of public life. While 'the voluntary *means* were an essential part' of his subject's liberal convictions, so, too, 'were the Christian *ends*' (p. 42).

In arguing that, for much of the nineteenth century, 'Canadian liberal thought was practically inseparable from the culture of Protestant dissent that first gave it life', Forbes also contributes to our understanding of religious liberty as a concept that emerged within specific traditions of Protestant thought (p. 201). Invoking recent works by historians and political theorists, Forbes suggests that John Locke's foundational writings on the subject reflected perspectives on issues of dissent, the religious establishment and Roman Catholicism that would later be adopted by Canadian liberals. *Protestant liberty's* implications for historical understandings of liberalism give the volume relevance beyond its immediate subject matter.

An additional contribution of *Protestant liberty* is its analysis of the durability of group identity, even among political liberals. Despite five decades of efforts to

do so, Forbes writes, ‘liberalism failed to supersede collective religious interests with its individual-based paradigm’ because ‘liberals had underestimated the persistence of the religiously based politics of collective identity’ (p. 19). Even the eventual embrace of the neutral liberty framework resulted not from the triumph of individualist ideology but from Liberal party leaders’ recognition that their political fortunes depended on ‘courting the Catholic vote’ (p. 157). Forbes’s book offers a cautionary reminder in the present moment – as the politics of collective identity seemingly grow stronger each year across the globe – about the limits of liberal politics and religion to challenge group identity.

One of the strengths of Forbes’s scholarship is its attentiveness to the religious ideas that underlay his subjects’ rhetoric. This is especially true in chapter i, where Forbes carefully interrogates biblical references in liberal-reform rhetoric, and in chapter ii, where he traces dissenters’ deployment of persecution narratives and millennialist themes in Canadian politics. It is the richness of these moments that makes the analysis feel uneven at other points in the book. When Forbes quotes one reformer as suggesting that state religion ‘violated “the religion of Jesus”’ the reader is left wondering what, for the book’s subjects, the ‘religion of Jesus’ was (p. 50). Was it the model of a primitive Christian community that many dissenting Evangelical groups idealised in this era? Or was it a set of ethical precepts set apart from historical Christian doctrines, as some liberal religious groups began to espouse in the mid-nineteenth century? Likewise, later chapters refer to ‘liberal Catholics’, without consistently defining whether their liberalism was political, religious or both, nor clarifying what their essential beliefs were.

Given Forbes’s persuasive claim that Canada’s Protestant liberals sought to build a society modelled on their understanding of Christianity, and that later alliances with Catholics guided the shift to neutral liberty, the meaning of terms like these matters. A deeper understanding of the underlying religious ideas guiding this book’s central figures would have made this important, compelling study all the richer.

TEMPLE UNIVERSITY,
PHILADELPHIA

DAVID MISLIN

Gender politics at home and abroad. Protestant modernity in colonial-era Korea. By Hyaewool Choi. Pp. xiv + 237 incl. 22 ills. Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020. £24.99 (paper). 978 1 108 72028 1

JEH (75) 2024; doi:10.1017/S0022046924000459

As Hyaewool Choi notes (p. 25), this book is a sequel to her earlier book, *Gender and mission encounters in Korea: new women, old ways* (Berkeley, CA 2009). That book explored how the notion of ‘modern womanhood’ was formed in Korea. In it, Protestant women missionaries from the US loom large as role models for the first generation of Korean women exposed to Western-style education. That book also served as a stepping-stone for this book, in which centre stage is given to the Korean women. *Gender politics at home and abroad*, while blemished somewhat by its diffused focus in question-framing, holds up well and, like its predecessor,