

We are introduced to marginal groups in Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century such as the German Catholics who followed the lead of Johannes Czernski and Johannes Ronge rather than the pope, 'free religious' congregations that could not subscribe to traditional biblical tenets, as well as monism and 'ethical culture' for the more esoterically minded. These numerically insignificant groups are variously termed the religious left, rationalist dissidents, radical rationalists, church radicals, rationalist deists or simply dissidents and make up what Weir calls a 'fourth confession'. The supra-confessional mentality of these establishment critics probably has more than a little to do with freemasonry, a system of morality which Weir only mentions *en passant*. It is no secret that not a few *Freigeister* – liberals but also socialists (Wilhelm Liebknecht, August Bebel, Wilhelm Pieck) – enjoyed intellectual freedom in mainstream as well as 'reform' lodges. Materialism rooted in popularised accounts of science or, rather, pseudo-science, pantheism and atheism thus entered the German body politic. Weir touches upon aspects of an anti-Christian petit-bourgeois mindset which, in the twentieth century, proved very congenial to the belligerent anticlericalism of left-wing parties in the Weimar system and also to the poisonous nationalism, racist and antisemitic worldview of National Socialism. But Weir's focus is not so much on the religious or ideological superstructures as on the socio-economic base of these quasi-religious groups and the political manifestations of their religiosity. Links between lapsed Catholics and Protestants with early forms of political liberalism are discussed. The focus is purportedly on Berlin, though Saxony was arguably the stronghold of non-mainstream politicised pseudo-religion. While one expression of anticlerical secularism has survived up to the present day (the youth dedication rite) and the numbers choosing to pay the compulsory administrative fee to officially leave the mainstream Christian Churches has in recent decades been increasing exponentially (over 400,000 adults in 2014 alone), the ultimate goal of the secularist movement, namely to completely sever the operational ties and purse-strings binding the Church to the state in Germany, is far from being achieved. Today the German state is presided over by a man who is a pastor by profession (though that has not stopped him living in open adultery) and the daughter of another Lutheran pastor is in charge of the government. Ironically, in spite of the record number of annual exits the Churches are still raking in record receipts, literally billions of euros annually, in the form of church taxes and government subsidies. Sadly, secularism seems to have made its peace with this dysfunctional system which, today, is patronised by parties calling themselves 'Christian'.

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Methodism in Australia. A history. Edited by Glen O'Brien and Hilary M. Carey. (Ashgate Methodist Studies.) Pp. xix + 308. Farnham–Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015. £70. 978 1 4724 2948 3
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Methodism was a distinctively British religious phenomenon; yet historically it became a broadly international religious movement that continually readapted to a myriad of local circumstances. Playing on that theme, this book coherently

and clearly outlines the ways in which Methodism 'can be seen as ... the most Australian of churches' (p. 277). Among other things this included colonial Australia providing a 'level playing field in which the churches could compete for souls and may the best preachers win' (p. 274) and the 'relatively smooth path towards union' (compared to Britain) which might reflect a 'greater pragmatism on the part of Australian Methodists' (p. 274). This is a sophisticated and wide-ranging collection of essays, expertly edited by Glenn O'Brien and Hilary Carey, which features a cast of well-respected Australian religious historians. It is nicely timed to coincide with the bicentenary of Methodism's formal introduction into the Australian colonies. For convenience it is divided into two parts. The first, labelled 'Histories', traces in broad chronological fashion the Australian Methodist story from Samuel Leigh's arrival in New South Wales in 1815, to the creation of an Australasian-wide Wesleyan Methodist Connexion in 1855, to the union of the various Methodist branches in 1902, and finally to the eventual incorporation of Methodists within the wider Australian Uniting Church in 1977. This section's strength lies in its differentiated regional focus (concise histories of Methodism in New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia), and the chronological treatment of post-union Methodism through the lenses of empire, nationhood and cultural change (the impact of the 'swinging sixties', p. 275). The editors acknowledge the omission, for pragmatic reasons, of a history of the Northern Territories. Part II, labelled 'Themes', selectively and carefully considers the wider significance of Methodism's place in Australian religion and society with respect to religious experience, worship and music, missions and Pacific regional connections, women, scholarship and Methodist historiography. Again the editors appropriately acknowledge other themes that could have been considered (theological education, social services and ecumenism). Others that could have been considered in discrete fashion are effectively integrated through and across the chapters. Given the complexities of Australia's geographical and political landscape, the resulting achievement is impressive for its ability to provide a nuanced religious history. As such it provides a benchmark, perhaps, for achieving the same for other federated contexts like Canada and the United States of America. It is appropriately reflexive in its consideration of intrinsic Methodist evolution (in a complex and often problematic colonial context) and of Methodism's relationship to wider society and culture. At the same time it is a nationally framed history (which is fairly defended by its editors), with a less successful tilt at acknowledging important transnational themes, connections and influences (especially with respect to the trans-Tasman and Pacific worlds). This is, however, less of a weakness than it is an invitation to further exploration. It is a timely history and a fitting contribution to Australian reflections on two hundred years of being Methodist in the great southern land.

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