CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

BOOK REVIEW AND NOTE

Clergy Education in America: Religious Leadership and American Public Life, 1785 to 1935. By **Larry A. Golemon**. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021. ix + 365 pp. $83.00 hardcover.

In *Clergy Education in America*, Larry Abbott Golemon explains the role of theological schools in cultural production in the first 150 years of the United States. Through a historical analysis of early Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish seminaries, Golemon explains how these theological schools trained their students to contribute to both their own religious communities and to the development of a broader civil society. In analyzing the goals of early American theological schools, Golemon integrates scholarship on specific schools, and the pastors, priests, and rabbis they trained, to describe the development of religious leaders "with distinctive culture-building capacities" (80).

In chapter 1, Golemon outlines the scope of culture building, highlighting "the five social arenas of clergy cultural production" (11). He argues students in early theological schools were trained to lead not only in their own congregations or religious communities, but also within families, schools, voluntary associations, and popular media. Through each of these arenas, seminary graduates were able to build a stronger civil society. In later chapters, Golemon relates his case studies of specific seminaries and religious leaders to these five social arenas.

In chapters 2 through 4, Golemon focuses on specific religious traditions, exploring his theory of theological education and culture building in Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish theological schools respectively. In each of these chapters, he analyzes specific cases (i.e., seminaries, individual students, or teachers), relating them to his framework of "clergy cultural production" (11). Despite the theological, historical, and cultural differences between the religious traditions, theological schools in each equipped clergy with the skills to lead in both religious and public realms. I found the included cases persuasive, and each provides texture and support for Golemon's argument, but I would have liked to see a discussion of how and why Golemon chose to focus on those cases, and not others on the vast lists of seminaries and voluntary associations in appendices A through C.

In chapter 5, rather than examining specific religious traditions, Golemon extends his analysis to historically disadvantaged groups, exploring the expansion of theological schools to include "women, African Americans, and working class whites" (155). Although religious education in each of these groups left disparate contemporary legacies, Golemon explains how each extended leadership opportunities to previously excluded groups. This chapter, in particular, provides important historical context to many contemporary discussions in American politics and religion. The relationship between historically Black churches, political mobilization, and social transformation, for example, has an active and multidisciplinary research agenda. Golemon's work contributes to this literature by highlighting the early roots of theological schools serving as training grounds for social and community transformation.

Although Golemon's analysis ends in the 1930s, he describes how theological education for women and for Black Americans fostered a legacy of leadership that extended

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640724000842 Published online by Cambridge University Press

well beyond his time frame of analysis. The "early forms of women's theological education," for example, "laid the foundation for future women clergy" (155), and many of the graduates of African American seminaries went on to advance the need for equal rights in their own predominantly white denominations and lead the Civil Rights movement in broader American society (174). Moreover, Golemon describes how Bible schools appealing to working class White Americans "became hotbeds of Biblical militancy . . . [making] them susceptible to a host of conspiracy theories" (190). In a time where conspiracy theories and militant rhetoric are common features of contemporary political and religious discourse, Golemon's text can serve as a resource for scholars on topics such as Christian nationalism and the religious right.

In chapter 6, Golemon analyzes Protestant schools when outlining the transformation and alignment of theological schools with modern research universities. This realignment was characterized by a movement away from interdisciplinary training, liberal arts curriculum, and expansive leadership development and toward a curriculum of increased specialization. In the conclusion, Golemon provides a list of "best practices" for reorienting theological training toward revitalizing public life. Although the book, as a whole, offers a historical perspective on theological education, Golemon's own educational background and continued work within theological educational communities allows him to connect his book's findings to current challenges in American theological education.

Clergy Education in America can serve as a resource for scholars across disciplines who desire a deeper understanding of the goals and outcomes of early American theological schools. Although the text is focused on clergy education in the first 150 years of the United States, Golemon's work speaks to several contemporary discussions in religious and political scholarship. In a time of intense partisan and religious polarization, Golemon's analysis offers a glimpse into how clergy education once helped religious leaders to build (rather than divide) communities and to develop a stronger civil society. As scholars in political science, sociology, religious studies, and history consider the efficacy (or even presence of) a contemporary civil religion, they would do well to look to Golemon's analysis of how clergy once contributed to an American civil religion.

Cammie Jo Bolin
University at Albany, SUNY
doi:10.1017/S0009640724000842