

## REVIEW

Kevin M. Schultz

*Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews  
Held Postwar America to its Protestant Promise*

(New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), hardcover, vii + 209 pp.

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*Tri-Faith America* examines how mid-twentieth century Americans shed their belief in the "Protestant nation," replacing it with three distinct, equally patriotic faiths: Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. This tripartite division—made famous in Will Herberg's *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (University of Chicago Press, 1960)—is not, of course, news to historians of religion in mid-century America. However, author Kevin Schultz gives us the most thorough history to date and does an excellent job showing how the tri-faith ideal developed and became widely accepted. He traces its beginnings to liberal Protestants in the 1920s, who were motivated both by feelings of a brotherhood of all Americans after the First World War as well as a revulsion toward increased nativism, the KKK and, later, fascism and totalitarianism. They sought ways to define their democratic nation against these European trends and to eradicate deep-seated antisemitism and anti-Catholicism. Particularly welcome here is Schultz's discussion of the invention (and popularization) of the term "Judeo-Christian," which remains widespread and misunderstood today (pp. 58-59). Schultz then traces how, in the 1950s, Catholics and Jews took the lead in the tri-faith movement, holding the nation to the "Protestant promise" of individual conscience and liberty. Tri-faith movement proponents saw it as a bulwark against totalitarianism (memories of Hitler loomed large) and communism, while also focusing attention away from more controversial questions emerging about race (e.g., pp. 55-56). By the early-1960s, however, tri-faith leaders embraced civil rights, finally supplanting their own cause as they began to see race, rather than religion, as the nation's most prominent division and pressing problem (Chapter 8).

Schultz is particularly good at illustrating interactions between Catholics and Jews. For example, he shows how Catholics worried at first about being "lured" into Protestant-run groups that would then claim to speak for Christians as a whole. The inclusion of Jews—making dialogue groups "tri-faith" rather than "bi-faith"—reassured Catholics and encouraged their involvement (p. 34). As the movement gained momentum in the post-war period, Catholics and Jews remained in fundamental agreement about the need to confront the de facto Protestant establishment (pp. 120-121) but they clashed repeatedly about the role of religion in the public sphere. Catholics, as a large Christian minority (25% of the population), fought for non-denominational public Christianity. Most Jews, as a very small non-Christian minority, regarded any governmental support for religion (especially in public schools) with suspicion, using the courts to block its expression. Schultz points out that, in fact, 1950s Catholic religious pluralism was narrower than the Jewish conception. While most Catholics did not want non-Christian (Jewish) holidays in schools, for example, most Jews agreed that Christian holidays might be celebrated as long as other faiths were included as well (p. 127). Scholarly discussions of this period often focus on public schools and suburbs; Schultz takes the tri-faith notion further, looking at university fraternities (Chapter 6) and the 1950s debates about gathering data about religion on the U.S. Census (Chapter 7). Both

topics offer good examples of how Catholic and Jewish approaches to tri-faith differed and shed light on corners of American history not often explored.

Schultz's conclusion (and much of the introduction) is devoted to evaluating the mixed legacy of the tri-faith movement. It is a topic of continuing relevance to religious communities today, since, as Schultz points out, although establishment Protestantism and nativism waned in influence, Catholics and Jews suddenly found themselves facing new challenges. The (perhaps bitter) irony of the tri-faith movement is that it led to increased secularization, which was never the intended goal. Moreover, as Catholics and Jews were accepted into "Protestant" colleges, clubs, and mixed suburbs, they lost much of what had made them culturally and sociologically distinct, leading to assimilation and intermarriage. Schultz includes an affecting quote from Jewish sociologist Daniel Bell, characterizing post-1960s American Judaism as "a community woven by the thinning strands of memory" (p. 205). The author adds that today conservatives in each faith have more in common with each other than with the liberals in their own denominations (pp. 11, 208). This idea is often repeated in academic circles and presumably refers to political commonalities, rather than those based on theology, sociology, or even culture. My one complaint, then, is that Schultz neither explores nor substantiates this conclusion other than including a brief footnote attributing this "story" to Robert Wuthnow's *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton University Press, 1990) (p. 212). It is a letdown after the author's thought-provoking questions about the Jewish and Catholic focus on continuity.

This, however, is a minor complaint about an otherwise excellent book. *Tri-Faith America* incorporates significant archival material, touches on important issues, and moves effortlessly from elite perspectives to popular culture. Kevin Schultz does it all without producing a text that feels ponderous or over-written. Scholars will certainly profit from this book, but I would not hesitate to recommend it more widely or to assign sections to an undergraduate class (e.g., Chapter 4 on the suburbs). This is a helpful historical survey that also poses some deep questions about the pluralistic society we have built: is it good or bad for American religions?