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James Lowell Underwood and W. Lewis Burke, eds. *The Dawn of Religious Freedom in South Carolina*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006. Pp. xv + 222. \$39.95 (Cloth).

[1] A book compiled and edited by two lawyers and which promises to recount the incremental steps in South Carolina's colonial charters, Fundamental Constitutions, and early laws leading to the emergence of religious freedom, as it might be practiced by all, might not seem the most engaging read and might even be deemed irrelevant by those whose purview of academic interest does not encompass South Carolina specifically. However, *The Dawn of Religious Freedom in South Carolina* manages to prove itself a shockingly interesting work and one that will be increasingly relevant to all Americans in this day and age.

[2] The first two chapters, both authored by James Lowell Underwood, act as a general outline for the evolution of religious freedom in South Carolina, though it was not always a steady, upward trend. The first colonial charter was comparatively lavish in its toleration of religious diversity, but the 1670 Fundamental Constitution made the Church of England the established church of the land, which had numerous effects, one of which was to stunt the growth of other denominations as non-adherents were forced to contribute financially to the Church of England. The preference for the Anglican faith carried over eventually into the creation of religious qualifications for political participation, thus driving many Dissenters and other believers from Parliament. South Carolina law was frequently like a pendulum, swinging from relative toleration of diversity on one end to a web of laws mandating religious behavior (such as the one which forbade expressing displeasure with a sermon by leaving before its conclusion) on the other. It was not until the 1778 Constitution that the notion of an established religion was scrapped, allowing non-Anglican Protestant churches to incorporate, and only in 1790 did Catholics and Jews finally obtain that right.

[3] Subsequent chapters focus upon specific minority groups as they struggled against the legal tide in South Carolina. Richard and Belinda Gergel track the experience of the Jewish community from colonial times up to the Civil War. Alexander Moore examines the political acculturation of the Huguenots, whose French origin added its own barrier to official toleration. In one of the most interesting chapters of the book, Bernard E. Powers Jr. looks

at the experience of slaves and free blacks in South Carolina up to 1830, reminding us that religious freedom remained a race-based right, especially as slaves proved adept at using Christian teaching “as a yardstick by which the behavior of the master class could be judged and condemned” (140), thus raising the question as to whether or not religious education should even be allowed them. Orville Vernon Burton and David Herr, in a chapter that could be South Carolina’s answer to Nathan O. Hatch’s *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), track the growth of the evangelical ethos in the state, especially as it evolved from a democratic and prophetic movement that condemned slavery into a system that “came to represent respectability” and, as such, “had a stake in the preservation of slavery” and white patriarchy (155). The story of the Quakers is told by W. Scott Pool, who argues that the “Quakers offer us an important case study for understanding how religious toleration operated in South Carolina,” given that the ethos of the Quakers directly contradicted that of the state and that the environment grew so poisonous, despite official toleration, that there occurred a great out-migration of Quakers to other parts of the country. To wrap things up, Peter Clarke and Underwood present a chapter on Bishop John England, who must have been the nineteenth-century answer to John Courtney Murray for his embrace of the democratic ideal and his desire to demonstrate that Catholicism was not contrary to the American system of governance.

[4] There are several themes to this book that should strike the reader as having special import as we today engage in that perennial debate upon matters of church and state. Underwood et al. demonstrate that there is a fundamental difference between toleration of other religions and the full legal right for people to worship as they please. As demonstrated by the back-and-forth of South Carolina’s early laws, toleration is bestowed from a position of superiority and may easily be revoked. Too, a religious establishment may stunt the ability of government to adapt by limiting debate: “Not only do religious qualifications for public office collide with the religious freedom of the would-be officeholder, they are also antithetical to democratic debate by presuming certain political doctrines to be divinely ordained,” argues Underwood (23). In addition, changing demographics may mean that today’s dissenter sect is tomorrow’s establishment, as might have been the case with the rise of evangelical churches in South Carolina; full religious liberties, therefore, protect tomorrow’s minorities as much as today’s.

[5] However, the most important theme I took from this book is the need for a healthy separation of church and state for many reasons, one of which is that, contrary to the beliefs of some, it provides the only environment in which religion might grow freely. Reading this book, I was reminded of Anthony Shadid’s *Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats, and the New Politics of Islam* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001). A female informant of his in Iran makes the statement, “No shah could ever de-Islamize Iran the way the Islamic regime did” (201). In many ways, no one could ever de-Anglicize South Carolina the way the established Church of England did. An established church is simply another arm of the government and is a church robbed of all prophetic calling and moral backbone; governments will always fall short of the ideal, but a church that relies upon the government for money is one likely to accommodate a range of evils, all for the sake of that regular check. Not offering promised spiritual sustenance or enlightenment, it will diminish. Too, a church facing legal oppression

by the government may also succumb to certain appeasement in order to gain the benefits of official toleration. The balancing act that we must live with is separation.

[6] That Underwood et al. have been able to use the legal and religious history of South Carolina as a microcosm for the greater struggle between the forces of separation and establishment is a credit to their labor. This is a book that anyone interested in the interrelationship of religion and government should pick up, for it holds a vital relevance for historical and current trends.

Guy Lancaster, *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*