

strict regime of the new Swiss Palmarian pope, other accounts by scholars who would interact with present members, looking for answers to the question why, while many left the Palmarian Church, some decided to stay.

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Cowboy Christians. Marie W. Dallam. Oxford University Press, 2018. 248 pages. \$35.00 cloth; ebook available.

Deftly blending material from historical sources, interviews, attendance at events, and a survey, Marie Dallam characterizes and analyzes a growing and diverse group of churches and ministries that appeal to those who participate in or identify with cowboy or western heritage culture. To set the scene Dallam charts the history and evolution of the image of the cowboy in North American society. She emphasizes that cowboy churches, even when they do not include working cowboys among their ranks, center on the idealized image of the cowboy as “a rugged family man who is both conservative and independent. He may not be very educated, but he is sincere, having learned from his own rough past” (9).

Dallam traces the development of cowboy Christianity from diffuse individual efforts to devise a form of Christianity that would pose few barriers to connecting with a mobile, hard-working, and often rough-around-the-edges target audience to a complex and variegated contemporary movement. She strikes an effective balance between emphasizing the diversity of cowboy Christianity and identifying its common roots in conservative, evangelical Protestantism. In a set of vivid short vignettes Dallam also provides insight into many of the central figures in the history of the cowboy church.

Of particular interest to readers of *Nova Religio* will be Dallam’s description of the cowboy church movement as a new religious movement or, better, a cluster of related new religions. To support her case she appeals to the “age and marginality” of the movement in general (see 21). More specifically, she argues that conceiving of the Stockyards Cowboy Church, one of the first of its kind in the mid-1980s, as a new religion helps to illuminate both its rapid growth and its quick demise (see 83). She also effectively uses Eileen Barker’s concept of “secondary socialization” to clarify the challenge that many pastors of cowboy churches face in dealing with adult members who have little or no experience of what is entailed in being participating members of a church community (see 129).

Dallam’s knowledge of new religious movements also supports her efforts to place cowboy churches in comparative perspective. She

introduces the “Jesus movement” of the 1970s, the “new paradigm” churches such as Calvary Chapel and the Vineyard Church, mega-churches like Saddleback and Willow Creek, and men’s ministries such as the Promise Keepers, as potentially instructive points of comparison. She argues that it is not since the Jesus movement that we have seen an American subcultural group “identified primarily by material characteristics and an idealized system of values, engage anew with Christianity and build itself into an institution” (186 and following.). She identifies Cowboy Christianity as focusing on a relational, rather than intellectual or emotional, approach to church.

This is a very engaging and astute book. Dallam displays an eye for significant detail and a thorough command of her sources. Both her narrative and analysis are lucid and straightforward. *Cowboy Christians* should be accessible to undergraduates and rewarding for scholars.

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