

Church and the Established Church, though less so with the UPs. It has to be said that reading the churchmen's opinions through the mouthpiece of newspapers, which had slightly different agendas, makes for a confusing narrative, but Mallon has largely succeeded in unpicking it.

The first twenty years of the Free Church was a time of great hope and ambition, tempered with a growing realization that the central pillar of the Disruption, the replacement of the Established Church with a new "true" Free Church as the national church, was not going to happen. *Dissent after Disruption* finishes at a point when the Established Church was beginning to recover from the loss of so much of its talent and when the dissenting churches were embarking on the next phase of operating in a multi-denominational state and moving toward union. Despite minor shortcomings, Mallon has done a great service to historians in unpicking the strands of ever-changing opinions and positions to deliver a cogent picture of the mid-Victorian church in Scotland and its relationship to affairs of state.

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Teacher, Preacher, Soldier, Spy: The Civil Wars of John R. Kelso.
By Christopher Grasso. Oxford University Press, 2021. viii+ 529
pp. Hardcover \$34.95.

Christopher Grasso's biography of John Kelso—"a teacher, a preacher, a soldier, and a spy; a congressman. . . a Radical Republican. . . a Methodist. . . an atheist"—is a good book, and you should read it (415). If a book is good I wish people would state that and save everyone the time of wading through swamps of jargon only to, at journey's end, remain confused as to the final verdict. This is a good book well written and will prove useful to the student and scholar alike. Biography done right, its first strength, the book also, in its ample focus on the Civil War's western theater, sheds light on this still overlooked region of America's most famous conflict. Grasso's historiographical ambition is impressive. The Civil War narrative is worthy of Shelby Foote or Gary Gallagher (take your pick of the professional or "popular," Grasso has something for you either way), his focus on nineteenth-century concepts of "manliness" in the same league as Gail Bederman's *Manliness and Civilization*, his use of historical memory as deftly done as David Blight (*Race and Reunion*) and, returning once more to the prime vehicle, biography, one cannot help but see something of Timothy Tyson's *Radio Free Dixie* here. Tyson knew his subject, Robert F. Williams, on a deeply personal level, dining with him and his family on multiple occasions. Grasso did not go so far with Kelso but, alas, it was accidents of time, and Kelso's death on 131 years ago, that is to blame. For Grasso so naturally and completely presents Kelso that you finish the book thinking they were childhood friends. Character intimacy is the calling card of good biography. This work has it in spades.

Furthermore, in addition to good biography and the western theater getting its due, the book is about the largeness of nineteenth-century America, the time of the Transcontinental Railroad, the telegraph and the telephone, gold in California, in

Colorado and in Alaska too, Chicago's World Fair and new meaning of freedom once our "Great War" had come to a close. John Kelso was large, in personality and by feat. As Grasso notes, laconically, "Kelso had long intuited that he was destined for greatness" (283). Possessed of an ambition "to win fame," he, the nineteenth century in miniature, microcosmically reduced into a representative man, went to college not just to learn but to become the "lion of the college" (20,67). "Itinerant schoolteacher," and a polymath praised for his abilities in "languages, philosophies, and mathematics," he went off to war as a diehard Unionist beginning as an ardent opponent of the secessionist fervor about him and ending as the famous, if not infamous, spy, scout, and horseman "Hero of the Southwest," "Old Kelso the Rebel Killer" (45, 196, 72, 190, 209). Kelso certainly believed his own hype, once sparing a man only so as to proclaim "Remember that it was *Kelso* who saved you!" (152). Elected to Congress after the War, he was an equally fervent proponent of post-War Unionism *qv.* Radical Republicanism, advocating for fully equality for African-Americans and ever thirsty for a no clemency chastisement of the treasonous rebels who had launched the then recent troubles and thrown the whole land, and him personally, into so much sorrow and suffering (220–278). He even wrote extensively on sex and feminism and, as such, offers additional proof of his status as a wide-ranging man of a most wide-ranging time in American history (322–326).

While three major contributions are more than most scholars can hope for in a single volume, Grasso's investigation into Kelso's religious views and life might be the book's most fascinating content. Reluctant to be baptized as a child, Kelso came into mainstream Protestant Christianity only to confess that much of his attraction to preachers was their abilities as "skillful story tellers who could manipulate others and enhance their own power and wealth" (21). One imagines Kelso might cynically find himself at home in the soft cushion, extra frothed latte, light show and big screen TV megachurch prosperity gospel denominations of America, 2022. A "tortured soul" mired in "desolate absence" and riddled with "religious despair" and nightmares of hellfire, Kelso transformed his St. Teresa of Avila-style dark night of the soul not into a deeper faith, as is sometimes the case, but, as is also at times the case, into militant atheism (415, 26, 34). "I have no belief in the existence. . . [of God]," he would eventually state, plainly (111). But with impressions to be made and influence to be gained, Kelso did not keep this "conversion" to "science" and "reason" to himself. Becoming a popular speaker with his *Deity Analyzed* lectures, Kelso viciously attacked Christianity, Old Testament and New, with a ferocity that might make even Richard Dawkins blush (351, 360). And yet Kelso, very much the real version of Flannery O'Connor "God haunted" *Wisblood* protagonist Hazel Motes—who spends that book working with every fiber of his being against religion only to, at the end, repent and dive headlong into the most austere, Middle Age penances in reparation for his sins—comes back to Christ at the close of his life even if unorthodoxly, claiming, curiously if not comically, that Jesus' real message was "the doctrine of anarchism" and that the "creation of heaven *on* earth [my emphasis] would come about only by a great struggle." Somewhere, across the great expanses of time and eternity, the liberation theologians of the 1970s offer him, John R. Kelso, a long and raucous standing ovation.

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