Governor LeRoy Collins of Florida: Spokesman of the New South
by Tom R. Wagy

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archbishop) of the newly-formed Miami diocese. Their quarrels over property allocations, responsibility for debts, and staff divided the church in Florida and saddled the new diocese with heavy financial burdens. Most important, argues McNally, the Hurley-Carroll split caused Carroll and his followers to abandon their ties to the church’s past interests and accomplishments in south Florida. Carroll focused attention on his administration and cultivated a myth of a new Catholicism in south Florida. Unfettered by history and tied only by land to its mother diocese, Miami now made its own history by rooting its actions in current concerns rather than in any understanding of the past.

As McNally shows so well, the new diocese had enough new concerns to occupy its time and talents. Especially troubling was the increasingly large and diverse Hispanic population crowding into south Florida. Indeed, the Cuban challenge, which involved assimilating large numbers of Cuban refugees who were Catholic in culture but distrustful of or at least indifferent to the church in practice, taxed traditional south Florida’s Catholicism spiritually and materially. Despite efforts to reach out to the new population through social service agencies and voluntary associations, the church never won its loyalties. Meanwhile, the church also struggled to serve the needs of its other constituents. In schools, vocations, and social outreach, the church failed to impose a uniform Catholic morality or identity. Regarding the Cubans at least, many continued to practice their popular religions, such as santeria, or adapted Cuban Catholicism to the new environment. Changing liturgical practices and attitudes toward lay roles in the church, among other influences wrought by Vatican II, further complicated the ministry in the ethnically diverse Miami diocese. The tensions between native and Cuban Catholics mirrored the unsettled state of south Florida Catholicism as it entered a new stage of development under Vatican II, new leadership, and a growing, but divided “Catholic” population.

Although McNally’s account hardly mentions Tampa, or other southern Catholic communities for that matter, his book’s importance transcends its limited geographical confines. By neatly charting the uneven course of Catholicism in the south Florida setting, McNally reminds us that the institutional development and social composition of the Catholic church, or any church, cannot be understood outside of their particular geographical and cultural environment. McNally’s seeming “bricks-and-mortar” emphasis on bishops and church building in fact helps to show how the physical construction of the church as an institution and the personalities of church leaders both shaped the character and focused the social vision of Catholicism. In those ways, his book speaks to Tampa’s history and present concerns as fully as it does to those of any American Catholic community. McNally shows, then, that the presentism of Coleman Carroll notwithstanding, history still matters.

Randall M. Miller


In contrast to its deep South neighbors of Georgia and Alabama, Florida has enjoyed a reputation as a progressive state. The restrictive economic and racial patterns that created the image of Dixie as a backward and repressive region also applied in Florida, but the Sunshine
State managed to avoid much of the scorn heaped upon its former allies in the lost Confederate cause. Part of the credit for this favorable perception must go to Thomas LeRoy Collins, who served as governor of Florida from 1955-1961 and guided the state with a moderate hand through a fractious period. Unlike gubernatorial contemporaries such as Orville Faubus of Arkansas who waved the flag of massive resistance against racial desegregation, Collins attempted to calm passions and obey the law of the land.

There was little in Collins' background to suggest that he would handle civil rights issues differently than did other southern politicians of his generation. Born at Tallahassee in 1909, he grew up in a society where rigid racial segregation deprived blacks of their rights as first-class citizens. Collins did not question this prevailing system, but he was taught by his parents to treat blacks with kindness. During a period when lynchings were common in Florida and the rest of the South, paternalism, though no substitute for equality, was a humane alternative. His family also instilled in Collins a deep religious faith and a belief in free enterprise and public education, values that he held throughout his life. As a state legislator for some two decades, Collins joined the “business progressive” wing of the Democratic party, which sought to modernize the machinery of Florida government and promote economic growth in the state. His two terms as governor brought some needed reforms, especially in education, but failed most notably in the area of legislative reapportionment.

Tom Wagy correctly points out that the ultimate measure of Collins' political leadership came in the area of race relations, the most troublesome issue of his time. The civil rights movement that gained momentum in the South during the 1950s thrust Collins into the center of the storm of controversy. Confronted by the Supreme Court’s monumental decision in support of school desegregation and faced with a mass social movement in which blacks boycotted buses in his native Tallahassee and engaged in lunch counter sit-ins throughout the state, Governor Collins responded cautiously. He did not challenge segregation but looked for ways to maintain it peacefully and legally. More concerned with the negative impact that racial strife would have on the economic climate of investment in Florida, Collins only gradually perceived that the struggle for civil rights was based on fundamental principles of fairness that could not be easily compromised. His attempts as governor to walk a fine line between what he saw as the extremes of racial agitation and reaction produced neither lasting peace nor justice throughout his administration. To his credit, Collins began to realize this failing by the time he stepped down from office, and thereafter he identified himself more closely with the morality of the civil rights cause. As head of the federal government’s Community Relations Service in 1965, he played a leading role in ensuring that Martin Luther King, Jr.’s march from Selma to Montgomery was completed successfully. On this occasion, Collins’ preference for avoiding violent confrontations did not interfere with the quest for equal justice. However, in 1968, Collins paid dearly for his association with Dr. King and the civil rights movement, as disapproving Florida voters defeated his candidacy for the United States Senate.

Wagy has written a well-balanced biography of Collins that reflects favorably upon his subject. Both fair and critical, he is adept at tracing the evolution of the governor's thinking on the crucial issue of race. Philosophical growth and integrity are not easily found in a politician, but Wagy reminds us that sometimes a LeRoy Collins comes along who possesses both of these qualities.
Seth Bramson was preparing to write this book for the last twenty-five years. A major part of his life has been devoted to gathering photographs, facts and memorabilia from the unique Florida East Coast Railway—just for the love of it. Now we all can see the tangible evidence of his personal collection and work through the pages of this well done history of the men, Henry Flagler and Edward Ball, and their railway. This is a company that was not satisfied with just playing a leading role in the development of every major city on Florida’s East Coast; in addition it pushed on across the sea by rail to Key West and thence by railway ferry all the way to Cuba.

This story begins in 1882 and extends through 1984—more than 100 years! Included are booms, busts, corporate take-overs, hurricanes and major wars. Through it all the railway continued as one of Florida’s major boosters. Seth Bramson has done a fine job of capturing the