

Despite these very minor concerns, there is little doubt that Hack's monograph, published on the heels of nearly a dozen peer-reviewed articles that he has written on the subject over the past few decades, is required reading for any scholar interested in the Malayan Emergency. Hack's attention to detail as well as the balancing of perspectives offers the most comprehensive account of the conflict yet published, and any future histories written on the subject will no doubt owe a debt of gratitude to Hack for providing such an empirically rich study on this important moment in British imperial history.

David Baillargeon 
University of Texas at Arlington
David.Baillargeon@uta.edu

JOSEPH HARDWICK. *Prayer, Providence and Empire: Special Worship in the British World, 1783–1919*. Studies in Imperialism. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021. Pp. 296. \$120.00 (cloth).
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The “special worship” of Joseph Hardwick's *Prayer, Providence and Empire: Special Worship in the British World, 1783–1919* is a technical term that will be unfamiliar to many readers of this journal. Do not be put off: this is a fascinating, wide-ranging study. Hardwick addresses imperial subjecthood, colonial nationalisms, the environmental history of settler colonialism, the relationship between church and state, the public status of institutional religion, the respective authority of religion and science, and more. But what is special worship? The term refers to the tradition of calling the entire community to prayer, outside the usual rhythms of worship, to mark a specific public event. The community might give thanks for a blessing (such as a good harvest) or invoke God's intercession in a crisis (such as, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic). The practice raises many questions. Who had the authority to prescribe communal worship? How was the community in question defined? And what exactly was prayer supposed to achieve?


With *Prayer, Providence and Empire*, Hardwick builds on the work of the ongoing state prayers project, which until now has focused on metropolitan Britain (<https://www.special-worshipbritainandempire.com/>). Using material from twenty-two archives in four countries, Hardwick extends the project's focus to Britain's settler colonies: Australia, Canada, and southern Africa. In Britain itself, special worship grew controversial in the nineteenth century, opposed both by religious voluntarists and those who held that prayer was a distraction from the practical solutions that public calamities demanded. Yet in the same period special worship flourished among settler colonizers, who, despite their “confidence, mobility, violence and rapaciousness,” retained an “enduring sense of crisis, anxiety, vulnerability, and guilt” (231). In this environment, collective worship allowed these increasingly democratic societies to imagine themselves as “unities and communities” (228). While much scholarship on these colonies emphasizes the new, Hardwick's focus is on the role of “traditional practices, ideas and institutions” (5) in the construction of modernity.

Hardwick repeats his arguments across six thematic chapters. In chapters 1 and 2 he examines the civil and ecclesiastical leaders who issued calls to prayer; in chapter 3, the communities who participated; in chapter 4, the sermons given; and in chapters 5 and 6, the two most prevalent causes, drought and royal occasions. Several important themes emerge. First, Hardwick denies that the growth of democracy and religious pluralism in colonial societies pushed religion out of the public sphere. On the contrary, the endurance of special worship indicated a belief that these societies were “spiritual communities” and “moral beings” possessing a

“national conscience” (67) and capable of committing “national sin” (228). Concurrently, special worship allowed the Anglican, Nonconformist, and Catholic clergy alike to shore up their public authority. Participation might give religious minorities an avenue for enhancing their political status, but it was the Church of England that benefited most. It “became more publicly significant as its ties to the . . . state weakened” (230) after midcentury, and it embraced a new role as the leader of a generalized, cross-denominational civil religion. The state, too, “retained a religious identity” (67) even as its exclusive ties to particular churches were severed.

Second, Hardwick examines the communities built through collective worship. Special prayers could create the “horizontal simultaneity” (131) of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983), yet it produced different communities at different times. Hardwick identifies two countervailing trends. On the one hand, special worship became regionalized as settler colonies became more established, pluralistic, and democratic. On the other, imperial authorities toward the end of the nineteenth century attempted to use special worship to promote a sense of empire-wide national belonging, taking advantage of improved communication networks, and giving a newly important ceremonial role to the monarchy. On balance, though, collective worship best served the development of specifically Canadian, Australian, or South African nationalisms. Hardwick likewise examines the push and pull between inclusion in community-wide prayer and exclusion from it. Minoritized populations could participate in special worship as a political strategy for claiming imperial subjecthood and its attendant rewards. Nonconformists, Irish Catholics, French Canadians, Dutch Afrikaners, Jewish communities, Chinese Australians, and Australia’s Aboriginal peoples all pursued this strategy at times. Results varied. White Protestants benefited most; acts of special worship might bring “temporary acceptance and changes in status” (230) for others, but were more often used to construct an exclusively white community.

The final cluster of arguments concerns the presumed efficacy of prayer. The authorities who sponsored public worship and the communities who participated in it agreed that it was supposed to do something. But what, exactly? Some (not all) forms of special prayer petitioned God to intervene in the natural world. Doing so became increasingly controversial as scientific explanations for natural events grew more influential and the clergy came to emphasize “the workings of a ‘general’ as opposed to ‘special’ providence” (105). Hardwick explores this development most fully in an especially rich and interesting chapter on drought. Special prayers for drought proliferated in Australia, where droughts were exceptionally severe environmental, economic, and emotional crises. Some colonists valued prayer’s immediate material effects; others contended that prayer was outdated and advocated human remedies instead. The clergy, meanwhile, increasingly suggested that days of prayer were primarily useful as a time and space set aside for communal reflection. In this view, sin begat drought insofar as drought was caused by greedy, environmentally destructive practices such as over-farming (although these critiques rarely identified European colonization itself as the problem). Collective worship thus remained an appealing response to environmental emergency. Indeed, Hardwick shows that its advocates grappled with the same issues that concern the modern environmentalist movement: how to demonstrate the interdependence of far-flung peoples despite the uneven distribution of calamity or how to dramatize the suffering caused by abstract environmental pressures. In short, “special worship” turns out to be seriously interesting, however technical and unfamiliar the term.

Peter W. Walker 
 University of Wyoming
peter.walker@uwyo.edu