Politics and Religion, **13** (2020), 575–603
© Religion and Politics Section of the American Political Science Association, 2020
doi:10.1017/S1755048320000024 1755-0483/20

Ambiguities of Prophecy: Old Testament Rhetoric in the American Founding Era*

Jonathan Keller

Manhattan College

Abstract: Scholars have long recognized the impact of Hebrew prophecy on the rhetoric of the American Founding era, but they have assumed it is all of one type, the American Jeremiad, a clarion call for political action. In fact, biblical rhetoric during this era mirrors three types of Old Testament prophecy formulated at three distinct moments in ancient Biblical history: before, during, and after the Babylonian Exile of 587 BCE. I refer to these as repentance, Jeremiad, and disappointment. I interpret sermons by three leading Protestant ministers in order to demonstrate that all three types of Hebraic prophecy were prevalent during this era, but only one of them, the Jeremiad, seeks to inspire political action; second, the Jeremiad was prominent only during the Revolutionary War. Before the war, and after the ratification of the Constitution, the two quietistic modes of prophecy, repentance, and disappointment, are more prevalent. I conclude by speculating about what the American founders might think of the contemporary rhetorical landscape, where the Jeremiad has become dominant, drowning out more moderate forms of biblical discourse.

> *It* is *impossible for the man of pious reflection not to perceive in it a finger of that Almighty hand which* has *been so frequently and signally extended to our relief in the critical stages of the revolution* (Madison 2003, 226–7).
>
> *When the Almighty himself condescends to address mankind in their own language, his meaning, luminous as it must be,* is *rendered dim and doubtful by the cloudy medium through which it* is *communicated* (Madison 2003, 225).

Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Jonathan Keller, Manhattan College, 4513 Manhattan College Parkway, Riverdale, NY, 10471. E-mail: jonathan.keller@manhattan.edu

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Although the American founding era was indisputably steeped in biblical language, the influence of the Bible on the political thought of the period is remarkably underestimated. It is well documented that several of the founders were intimately familiar with Madison's "cloudy medium" of the Scriptures. In fact, many of them knew it from cover-to-cover and all of them recognized that making reference to Scripture helped ensure that a writer's ideas would be understood.[1] But an obsession with the Scriptures was more than just the province of the highly educated classes. As Mark Noll explains, Biblical phrases permeated both "the writing of the elite and the speech of the humble" in the early United States. So much so, according to Noll, that it became "the common coinage of the realm" in 18th century America (Noll 1982, 45). The phrases and cadences from the King James Bible informed both their written and spoken words, and its ideas unquestionably shaped their habits of mind. But a misunderstanding remains regarding how the Bible was actually used by key figures during the era.

To be sure, more recent scholars have worked hard to reestablish the central role of the Bible in shaping the political thought of the founding era. More specifically, they have noted that politicians and pamphleteers —Federalists and Democratic-Republicans alike—frequently deployed the ideas of a particular type of Biblical rhetoric, Hebrew prophecy. Spanning a period of more than 300 years from the eighth to the fifth centuries BCE, the 15 books of The Prophets,[2] or more literally, "ones who are called" or "who announce,"[3] represent the world's oldest tradition of political rhetoric.[4] In the Bible, the prophets reveal God's will during periods of existential crises, when first Assyria and then Babylon threatened to destroy Israel. Scholars of American political thought have long had a special regard for the prophetic tradition, recognizing the broad influence Hebrew prophecy has had on American political thought and rhetoric. They have noted that the raw edges of Amos' populist invective and the deep despair of Jeremiah's lamentations are rarely far from the scene during periods of intense conflict in American history. Literary critic Sacvan Bercovitch first named this rhetoric "The American Jeremiad" (Bercovitch 1978), a definition recently refined by Andrew Murphy as "a call to action, an exhortation to reform the community in the image of its founders and godly ancestors" (Murphy 2009a; 2009b, 32). In spite of the recent interest in prophecy, political theorists have yet to account for the full range of the prophetic register.

I argue that the American Jeremiad only explains one type of prophetic rhetoric, one that calls directly upon citizens to take political action. In

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

fact, political sermons from the era mirror three distinct types of political rhetoric that appear throughout the Hebraic prophetic texts composed before, during, and after the Babylonian Exile of 587 BCE. I refer to these Hebraic narratives as repentance, Jeremiad, and disappointment. In American hands, each form is incendiary and casts America as biblical Israel. But only one of them, "The American Jeremiad," seeks to inspire political action. The other two types—repentance and disappointment—are pessimistic about the nation's future and encourage political quietism. An additional problem in the existing literature is that short shrift has been given to some of the most influential opinion leaders of the era: prominent Protestant ministers. This is odd because over 80 percent of political pamphlets from this era were written by ministers, and 10 percent of all pamphlets were republished sermons (Lutz 1988, 140). Hence, a further task of this article is to move these figures back to the center of the dramatic events of the era and to restore their marquee sermons (which were often delivered to thousands of rapt audience members) to their leading role within the main currents of eighteenth-century American political thought.[5] Failing to do so has led to an incomplete picture of how most ordinary citizens understood the tumultuous events in which they participated or which they witnessed swirling around them. As Ellis Sandoz pointed out, while "the role of the clergy as the philosophers of the American founding has not received great attention from students of political theory, it was abundantly clear to contemporaries" (Sandoz 1998, xii).

I interpret sermons by leading Protestant ministers in order to demonstrate that their prophetic rhetoric developed according to a very specific pattern: before shots were fired at Lexington and Concord, it was characterized by an indifference to monarchy, and was focused inwardly on sin and moral repentance. This was followed by an anti-monarchist cry for war, the American Jeremiad, a variety of rhetoric familiar to readers of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*. The final type reflects the disappointment of the post-revolutionary settlement of the Constitutional Convention and its aftermath. These biblical narratives persisted, I argue, because they provided ministers with a sacred language capacious enough to capture the political situation at any point along the historical trajectory of the American founding.

Interest in prophecy and its role in American political thought and rhetoric has grown in recent years, spurring a series of debates regarding whether prophets should be understood as social critics, and if so, what kind (Walzer 1987; Remer 2009); the degree to which prophetic discourse operates in a closed hermeneutic circle of identification and meaning

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(Bercovitch 1993; Murphy 2009a; 2009b) or whether instead prophesy represents a far more radical and democratic rhetorical practice which "engages the judgment of their audience" (Rogers 2015, 210). Others ask whether prophecy functions more as a special kind of "office," one "authorized by those to whom the prophet speaks" (Shulman 2008a; 2008b) rather than delivering instructions or predictions to the community from on high. Others have wondered whether the jeremiad is just another mode of political persuasion that is vulnerable to counter-persuasion like any other (Gutterman 2005; Hanska 2009) or whether it is inherently in tension with deliberative discourse (Smith 2008; Kaveny 2016), or whether something radically new can be produced via prophetic politics (Shulman 2008a; 2008b; Murphy 2009a; 2009b). In addition, there has been renewed interest in the African American prophetic tradition, in at least three broad areas: delineating how "prophecy from below" inverts or differs from the traditional American (Puritan) jeremiad (Glaude 2011). Others have debated whether prophecy ultimately served African-American political activists and critics of white supremacy by drawing on the genre of biblical prophecy, wherein African-Americans are equated with the biblical Hebrews exiled in Babylon, to expose dimensions of political life obscured by liberal language (Chappell 2005; Shulman 2008a; 2008b). Finally, whether the jeremiad is a rhetorical modality that still has a place in the contemporary struggle for racial equality, or whether it needs to be discarded as an antiquated relic of the past (Murphy 2009a; 2009b, 135). At some level all of these scholars are interested in whether prophecy is ultimately compatible with progressive political movements and whether prophecy has a place within a democratic political culture at large (Gutterman 2005).

I will demonstrate that a more contextual analysis of religious discourse in the Founding era enables one to more deeply understand the historical grounds of such debates about religion and democratic public life, religion and persuasion, and religion and equality. Over the next several sections, this article disentangles a monolithic notion of prophecy in the Founding Era, demonstrating that there are at least three discernible prophetic modes at work here. In the conclusion, I bring this tripartite analysis to bear on the more contemporary examples of speeches by President George W. Bush, the writings of Christian conservative writer Rod Dreher, and evangelical support for President Trump, in order to gain new insight into the role of prophecy in contemporary American political life and why Biblical discourse has been used continuously in America for over 400 years. The Bible's rhetorical forms are durable precisely because they are so

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

malleable. Clearly the American founders thought religion essential to the moral character of the nation. But one cannot help but wonder what they might think about the dominance of the American Jeremiad in contemporary political discourse, an uncompromising rhetoric that has managed to capture the rhetorical landscape while the more subtle forms of persuasion in the Bible have all but disappeared.

THE BIBLE AND THE MINISTRY IN THE AMERICAN FOUNDING ERA

Although it was sandwiched between the First and Second Great Awakenings, Wilson Carey McWilliams was mistaken when he characterized the American founding merely as an interregnum of Enlightenment and rationalism in which "the founding generation … rejected or deemphasized the Bible and biblical rhetoric." McWilliams went so far as to say that "Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* is almost alone among the great works of the founders in making an explicit appeal to the Bible" (McWilliams 1984, 21). Compared to the previous century's rhetoric of Puritan divines, it is easy to see why this claim might appear to be accurate. Biblical language in the founding generation seems muted at best, rhetorical window-dressing at worst.[6] In addition, scholars have long emphasized the secular character of the United States Constitution. As Kramnick and Moore argue, the "Godless Constitution" does not mention a heavenly creator even once; it contains an explicit prohibition against requiring religious tests for office holding; and the First Amendment forbids the establishment of a national religion (Kramnick and Moore 2005).

And yet the fact remains that *The King James Bible* could be found in virtually every eighteenth-century American home and colonial culture, especially in New England, was saturated in religious discourse (Lockridge 1974, 87).[7] This fact became dramatically more apparent following Donald Lutz and Charles Hyneman's extensive surveys of American political literature between 1760 and 1805. Reviewing an estimated 15,000 items, Lutz and Hyneman found that the Bible was cited more frequently than any European author or even any European school of thought, including the Enlightenment and Whig traditions.[8] In fact, the Bible accounted for approximately one third of all citations in political pamphlets (Lutz 1992, 136). Deuteronomy was the most frequently cited book, followed by Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* (Lutz 1992, 136).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Deuteronomy was cited almost twice as often as all of Locke's writings put together, and Saint Paul was cited about as frequently as Montesquieu and Blackstone, the two most-cited secular authors (Lutz 1988, 140). It is hardly surprising that they found such a saturation of Bible talk, since over 80 percent of political pamphlets from this era were written by ministers, and 10 percent of all pamphlets were republished sermons (Lutz 1988, 140).

The Framers' frequent use of the Bible should come as no surprise because they lived not only in an overwhelmingly biblically literate society, but one in which over 98 percent of people of American or European descent identified with Protestantism during this period (Kosmin and Lachman 1993, 28–29). Moreover, the overwhelming majority of the population (as much as three-quarters) identified with the family of sects religious historians call the Reformed theological tradition, a tradition with a particular disposition toward applying the Bible to political life with two distinct features: the notion that anyone could understand the Bible and the centrality of the role of Providence (Ahlstrom 1972, 350). Simply stated, Americans were curious to learn how God might be both directly and intimately involved in the affairs of their nation and directing the steps of their leaders. The best way to do that was to dramatize the moments and heroic figures of the Hebrew Bible, such as likening Washington to Moses or the warrior-leader Joshua, or comparing George III to Pharaoh, or, as Noll noted, "to depict the American-British conflict as between the woman and the beast of Revelation 12" (Noll 1999). While it is possible to debate both the amount and impact of the ministers' participation during this period, as Harry Stout has argued, the impact of religious ideas cannot be denied, particularly in New England, which maintained a high ratio of preachers to general population over time. By the time of the revolution, New England had 720 Congregational churches for a population of about 500,000—approximately one church for every 700 people.[9] More importantly, the average churchgoer listened to ~7,000 sermons in a lifetime (equivalent to 15,000 h of concentrated listening). All of this led Stout to conclude, "Until the last decade of the colonial era there were at the local level few, if any, competing public speakers offering alternative messages. For all intents and purposes, the sermon was the only regular voice of authority" (Stout 1986, 3).

Only a single minster, John Witherspoon, a Presbyterian and president of the College of NJ, took part in the Continental Congress and signed the Declaration of Independence, but he had a profound influence on the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

founding generation. Witherspoon trained not only a substantial segment of leading Presbyterian clergy but also a number of political leaders as well. Nine of the fifty-five participants in the Federal Convention in 1787 were College of NJ graduates, including James Madison, who spent an extra year studying Hebrew and philosophy with Witherspoon after his graduation in 1771. Moreover, his pupils included President Madison, Vice President Aaron Burr, 21 senators, 29 representatives, 56 state legislators, and 3 Supreme Court justices (Bonomi 2003, 209). The famed educator also had the distinction of being touted by John Adams as the first high-profile figure in NJ to publicly support the cause of independence, assuring Americans that God was on their side in the war with "Satan's Empire." While Witherspoon was unusual both in terms of his direct participation and considerable influence, like all prominent ministers who preached against the British crown, he was tasked with framing the revolution in theological terms during his legendary sermons every Sunday in Princeton. His pupils were everywhere in positions of command in the American forces during the Revolution.

In her groundbreaking work, *Visionary Public: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756–1800,* historian Ruth Bloch argued that the support that eventually came for the revolution developed overwhelmingly in "the remainders of Calvinist churches"—Congregationalists, Baptists, and Presbyterians (Bloch 2007, 49). Other denominations, most notably the Anglican Church, were torn apart by the revolution, which is part of the reason why there were far fewer pro-war sermons published by Southern ministers than by their counterparts from New England. While some Anglican priests joined the British cause, more than half of them were unable to reconcile their oaths of allegiance to George III with the independence of the United States and relinquished their pulpits during the Revolutionary War (Library of Congress).

Among these "neo-Puritan" ministers with large congregations, a religious tradition of millennial thinking was a popular, powerful, and persistent element. Bloch illustrated an enduring religious mentality that construed social and political developments in particularly eschatological terms, with many Americans conceiving of the imperial crisis with Britain as a struggle that would end "with the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth" (Bloch 1985, 167). Her argument maintains that they relied on the Scriptures to learn how God might be both directly and intimately involved in the affairs of their nation and directing the steps of their leaders. However, like most scholars working in this area, Bloch provides scant details regarding how these ministers actually engaged with the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Bible. A more fine-grained analysis of how the Bible shaped eighteenth-century understandings of America's political history is still needed.

The ministers at the center of my study narrated events as they unfolded by drawing an analogy between the political history of the Israelites (the narrative of the relationship between God and his chosen people in the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, and both Books of Samuel, Judges, and Kings,) and "The New Israel" of America. In the Bible, this encompasses the period from the Mosaic era, to the time of "confederate drift" in Judges,[10] concluding with the rise of the monarchy and subsequent dissolution into the divided kingdoms of Judah and Israel (Elazar 1992).[11] Five types of sermons were most commonly preached during this era. Election Sermons were given annually to the governor and legislature following the election of officers for 250 years in New England. This was the main vehicle for ministers to expound their political theology. It was an honor to be selected for this task, and these sermons were usually published afterwards. The Artillery Sermon was an annual affair and dealt with civic and military matters. Thursday or Fifth-day Lecture Sermons, begun by John Cotton in Boston in 1633, were popular events for gathering and discussing matters of social and political interest. The Occasional Sermon was given to commemorate particular events or to mark days of prayer, fasting, and thanksgiving. Finally, the most common of all was the Sunday sermon.

In the section that follows, I interpret three sermons by leading Protestant ministers, delivered before the Revolutionary War, during it, and after the United States Constitution was ratified. I chose these particular sermons for three reasons: they were all published works and enjoyed a wide circulation as pamphlets; they were all written by the leading lights of mainline Protestant denominations; and they shaped the opinions and greatly influenced the preaching of a wide swath of ministers who were politically active during this era.

MORAL REFORM AND POLITICAL QUIETISM BEFORE THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

While sermons from all three periods discussed in this article compare America to ancient Israel, the comparison is particularly apt prior to the Revolutionary War, because the colonies functioned similarly to a vassal state like sixth-century Judah. In the establishment churches, ministers did little preaching of political independence or of a national

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

greatness separate and apart from the British Empire. Like the ancient pre-exilic Hebrew prophets these ministers offered a Deuteronomic indictment on America, a scathing interpretation of secular events through the prism of the covenant with God. They predict, as Moses did shortly before his death, that the people's "foot shall slide" (Deuteronomy 32). The hope that one day God would redeem them is remote in these sermons, and they made abundantly clear that resisting the British would not be judged favorably by God.

Together with Jonathan Edwards, Thomas Prince (1687–1758) was considered *the* historian of the Great Awakening, authoring *An Account of the Revival of Religion in Boston in the Years 1740-1-2-3*, which was published posthumously in 1823. By the time he was officially ordained, Prince was already a noted sermonizer, fielding multiple offers to lead congregations in New England. He chose to lead Old South Church, a Congregationalist church originally established by John Winthrop that broke away in 1669. Prince was a quintessential example of a leading theological light from an establishment church at that time; he cautiously supported the religious revival in New England.[12] Prince's Election Day Sermon of 1730 was a special one given to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the landing of the Arbella. Ordinarily Cotton Mather would have been chosen to deliver it, but the scion of the famous Puritan family died in 1728, so the honor fell to Prince. On May 27, 1730, he delivered *The People of New England* before the MA State Legislature, a sermon later published by Massachusetts' official printer.[13]

Like all preachers who relied on the Hebrew Bible to explain American history, Prince first had to account for how a nation over 3000 years and 5000 miles away from the original and never mentioned in the Bible could really be a "New Israel." But what reads like an historical parallel to modern readers is not what Prince intended: he and his brethren did not recognize history as divided into distinct secular eras. Echoing Winthrop's words a hundred years before, Prince said that the people of New England were chosen because of their role in the continuous, sacred history of the Hebrew Bible, as the explicit "antitype" of the biblical Israelites:[14]

> I cannot forbear observing, that there never was any people on earth, so parallel in their general history to that of the ancient ISRAELITES as this of NEW ENGLAND. To no other country of people could there ever be so directly applied a multitude of Scripture passages in the literal sense, as to this particular country: that excepting miracles and changing names,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> one would be ready to think, the greater part of the HEBREW BIBLE were written about us; or that we, though in a lower degree, were the particular antitypes of that primitive [early] people (Prince 1968, 199).

Since this sermon was preached shortly before the installation of a new royal governor in MA, it is easy to see why we might frame ministers during this era as uninterested in the Bible's critique of monarchy. In fact, Prince appears enthusiastically supportive of the crown:

> …We also esteem it a joyful smile of Heaven, that our most gracious KING has given us principal rulers out of ourselves; men of known virtue, and well-acquainted with our constitution, genius, circumstance, and chief concern and interest (Prince 1968, 214).

More important, however, is the epigraph at the beginning of Prince's sermon, a quote from Samuel's farewell speech in the First Book of Samuel, where he is departing from political leadership, after anointing Saul to be Israel's first king: "It is the LORD that advanced MOSES and AARON, and that brought up your FATHERS out of the Land of Egypt; Now therefore, stand still, that I may Reason with you before the LORD" (Prince 1968, 184). The point of Samuel's departing message is to reiterate that all political leaders are chosen by God, a show of begrudging acceptance after he has spent most of the story railing against the evils an earthly king will bring. However, Samuel also offers a stern warning, in the manner of prophets Amos and Hosea, regarding the futility of political action. Both Samuel and God are offended when the Hebrews ask repeatedly and despite continued warnings to upend their political system and replace it with the unexceptional type all of their neighbors live under, to boot. The epigraph serves as a reminder that God, not man, is responsible for everything that occurs in the world, political or otherwise. We will see different degrees of agency in subsequent prophetic rhetorics.

Prince, echoing this skepticism of earthly politics, went on to warn that God's "own institutions ought not to be set on a level, mixed or debased with the low devices of men," before closing the first section of the sermon with a quote from Psalm 105 celebrating the "marvelous works that HE has done, his Wonders, and the Judgments of his mouth" (Prince 1968, 208). The Book of Psalms, a popular sourcebook for sermons since the Puritan era, which modern scholars are convinced has an intentional canonical shape (meaning that the Psalms were sequenced in an intentional and non-random way) was seen by the preachers as a

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

collection of 150 poems containing the full range of Israel's religious faith but having no intentional sequencing or over-arching coherent message. Prince did not look to Psalms for tales of heroic acts by human beings or to motivate political action, as his Revolutionary-era progeny would four decades later. Instead, Prince made clear that the answer to what ailed the people lay only in moral renewal. He asked,

> Have any of the other Plantations suffered so much as we, by cruel wars, depredations and bloodshed, impoverishing disappointments, fires, and losses, both by sea and land, contagious sicknesses and other evils, which have marked us out for the censure and condemnation of the world? (Prince 1968, 209).

Prince attributed this devastation of New England to a steady decline in morality since the Puritan founding. Channeling the declensive tone of second-generation Puritan ministers, Prince lamented, "But like that ancient people also, we have not hearkened to the voice of GOD, but hardened our necks against Him, and have done worse and worse in every generation" (Prince 1968, 211). Finally, Prince ended the sermon with Jeremiah 7:

> Since the day that your Fathers came forth out of the land of EGYPT unto this day, I have sent unto you all my Servants the Prophets, daily rising up early and sending them. Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their Ear, but hardened their Neck, they did worse than their Fathers…This is a Nation that obeyeth not the Voice of the LORD their GOD, nor receiveth Correction (Prince 1968, 212).

Prince made it clear, as clear as Samuel once did, that there could never be a political solution to a spiritual problem. In fact, he noted, God would be angered if the colonists took matters into their own hands and resisted British rule. The best the faithful could do, Prince contended, was to show humility in the eyes of God and obey St. Paul's admonition to "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1). The political moral that the tale from ancient Israel revealed was thus one of subservience. This was not a call to political action of any kind. In fact, it was a polemic against the kind of revolutionary sentiment that would later be a key facet of sermonizing. They urged only moral reform as an end in itself, not as the necessary precondition for political transformation that the "war ministers" in the next section would claim

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

it to be. Perhaps this also broadens the question raised by Gutterman (2005), Smith (2008) and Kaveny (2016) regarding the compatibility of prophecy with democratic discourse. Because different kinds of Hebrew prophecy often means a different degree (or the absence of) confrontation with political power, we might now wonder whether this type of prophecy is more compatible with a democratic political culture, as its focus is directed inward, while offering no attack on arrangements or the leaders of the polity.

THE "WAR JEREMIAD" AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Once revolution was afoot, establishment ministers began to espouse a radically different perspective on biblical history, though it involved more than mining the Hebrew Bible for God's views about kings, as Paine did in *Common Sense*. What we find instead in these sermons is the full range of the politically activating prophetic register, which included not only an increasing frequency of quotations from incendiary passages but also mimicking the style and substance of the ancient jeremiad.

These sermons provided a road map to a glorious future for America with several distinct features: an emphasis on moral reform as a key to demonstrating fealty to God (which is common to all classical prophecy); the characterization of doom as the first but not the last word; the procession from judgment to the anticipation of a new order; the urging of patriots to dig in and prepare for the long struggle; the notion that Americans would have a future greater than anything they had experienced thus far; and the call to action, but with the caveat that trust in God was ultimately the most important thing.

After graduating from Harvard University in 1740 (in the same class as Samuel Adams), Samuel Langdon (1723–1797) became a Congregational clergyman and educator, serving first as pastor in Portsmouth, NH before being appointed president of Harvard in 1774.[15] Fourteen years later Langdon was chosen to be a delegate to the NH convention that adopted the Constitution of the United States, where he was a vocal advocate for the Federalist cause. During the Revolutionary War his regular Sunday jeremiads—such as his famous *Government Corrupted by Vice* (1775),[16] which he preached a month after shots were fired at Lexington and Concord—were all fire and brimstone. In that sermon, he

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

denounced the corrupt British monarchy and located the original sin of political life, as Paine had done, in the evil of monarchy itself:

> That ever-memorable day, the nineteenth of April, is the date of an unhappy war openly begun, by the ministers of the king of Great Britain, against his good subjects in this colony…But for what? Because they have made a noble stand for their natural and constitutional rights, in opposition to the machinations of wicked men, who are betraying their royal master, establishing Popery in the British dominions, and aiming to enslave and ruin the whole nation, that they may enrich themselves and their vile dependents with the public treasures, and the spoils of America (Langdon 1862, 54).

Langdon's anti-monarchism only appeared in the first one-third of the sermon, however, quoting heavily from Jeremiah and Isaiah, he envisioned the wholesale rebirth of America, one that would be both religious and political. He located the causal factors of the colonists' predicament less in the glory and sins of an empire than in the vices and moral degeneration of Americans themselves. When he arrived at the "Application," while there is a clarion call to take up arms to destroy the monarchy, he said that this was only a secondary task commanded by God. Fidelity to God and the moral law was the only path to true redemption, he maintained. Finally, Langdon exhibited the hopeful optimism of the American Jeremiad, in which the future is imagined much as John Winthrop had imagined it, as a "City upon a Hill."

Langdon opened by saying that his sermon on the current predicament would be told explicitly through the story of Isaiah. The epigraph is from Isaiah 1:26: "And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city" (Langdon 1862, 50). Bailyn and Wood interpreted these types of statements as code for Roman republicanism. Indeed, Langdon made reference himself at one point to the corrupted state of the Roman republic under Julius Caesar, which did little more than "retain all its ancient formalities" (Langdon 1862, 62). Eran Shalev reads the "restore" to "the beginning" as Hebraic republican exclusivism, arguing that this anticipates the reintroduction of the *shoftim* (judges) into the polity, as heroic leaders (like Sampson, Deborah, and Barak) from Judges (Shalev 2013, 36–42). But neither the Republican school nor Shalev capture what Langdon actually intended.

Langdon chose Isaiah because he wanted to say to Americans what he believed Isaiah said to the Israelites: the problem was not that the political

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

arrangements needed to be altered; it was that the judges needed to be replaced by ones who were honorable. This sounds like a far less radical proposition, but consideration of the entirety of the sermon reveals that the message was that the form of rule as such was not the true source of the problem—just as it was not for Samuel, nor for any of the Navi'im. In the Hebrew Bible, societies under all types of political rule are equally susceptible to moral decay. Their citizens are equally likely to be guilty of syncretic religious practices, to fall for the charms of wealth, or to become decadent. The restoration of true belief, fidelity to God, and the honor of individual citizens were Langdon's main concerns. Overthrowing a political system alone could not save a nation or constitute an authentic polity. In order to restore the judges to what they were "at the first," the body politic had to be repaired. Good leaders would never emerge from a corrupted people. In Langdon's view political changes followed from religious reformation and redemption. The problem with the interpretation of Bailyn and those of a similar opinion is that they interpreted religious language as a proxy for a political claim, when in fact Langdon was interpreting political events through a religious lens, just as the prophets did.

To reinforce this point, Langdon turned next to a paraphrase of Jeremiah before returning to Isaiah to describe the long, slow civic decline of the British Empire, which he cast as analogous to the ancient kingdom of Israel:

> We must keep our eyes fixed on the supreme government of the ETERNAL KING, as directing all events, setting up or pulling down the kings of the earth at His pleasure, suffering the best forms of human government to degenerate and go to ruin by corruption; or restoring the decayed constitutions of kingdoms and states, by reviving public virtue and religion, and granting the favorable interpositions of His providence.
>
> The kingdom of Israel was brought to destruction, because its iniquities were full; its counselors and judges were wholly taken away, because there remained no hope of reformation (Langdon 1862, 54).[17]

Langdon continued rousing the crowd, explaining that the decline of civic virtue in the empire had infected the entire body politic—from monarch to lowly functionary. Their leaders are now all "men in whom we can have no confidence, whose principles are subversive of our liberties, whose aim is to exercise lordship over us…who are ready to serve any master" (Langdon 1862, 52).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In a style similar to Paine's, first Langdon prodded the crowd by trying to show that the bonds of affection that Americans shared with the British had worn thin. Then the remaining two-thirds of the jeremiad focused only on the Americans, building up to an exhortation to fight and then finally to the hope that the end result would live up to the colonists' expectations. He began the second-third mimicking Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's linking of sin with political misfortune, declaring "But, alas! have not the sins of America, and of New England in particular, had a hand in bringing down upon us the righteous judgments of Heaven?" (Langdon 1862, 64). With all of its focus on sin, idolatry, and moral decay, however, it is easy to forget that Langdon's sermon was ultimately a jeremiad for war. Like his pre-war predecessors, Langdon said that the colonists' ultimate end had to be the redemption of religion. However, contrary to his quietist antecedents, he ended with a call to arms consistent with other war sermons given at this time:

> At least five or six of our inhabitants were murderously killed by the regulars at Lexington, before any man attempted to return the fire, and…two more of our brethren were likewise killed at Concord Bridge by a fire from the king's soldiers, before the engagement began on our side…Our firm opposition to the establishment of an arbitrary system is called *rebellion*, and we are to expect no mercy but by yielding property and life at discretion…and therefore, we have taken arms (Langdon, 52).

Langdon then reinforced his call to arms by invoking two military episodes from the Hebrew Bible in order to demonstrate that God still stood with the Israelites. First, in Exodus 14, just before Moses parts the Red Sea, the Israelites were petrified as they fled from the larger and far more powerful Egyptian army. Then, however, the angel of God, who was travelling before the camp of Israel, moved to a position amongst them; and then "the pillar of the cloud stood behind them" (Exodus 14:19). Second, a variety of battle scenes in Joshua portray Yahweh as an invincible warrior-king who directs Israel's assault on the Canaanites, granting the tribes total victory only when they are fully loyal to their covenant with him. The battle scene that resonated most strongly for Langdon (and more generally in pro-war sermons during both the American Revolutionary and Civil Wars) occurs in Joshua 5:13. A supernatural "captain" of Yahweh's army suddenly appears to Joshua in human form, brandishing "a naked sword" (Joshua 5:13). Fighting invisibly alongside Israel's soldiers, the presence of this heavenly

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

commander reveals that God will resume his interventions on behalf of his people, if they are deserving:

> Oh, may our land be purged from all its sins! May we be truly a holy people, and all our towns, cities of righteousness! Then the Lord will be our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; and we shall have no reason to be afraid though thousands of enemies set themselves against us round about…He can destroy them with innumerable plagues, or send faintness into their hearts…He can work salvation for us, as He did for His people in ancient days, and according to the many remarkable deliverances granted in former times to Great Britain and New England (Langdon 1862, 72).[18]

Of the three types of prophecy, the Revolutionary War sermons most closely follow the account offered by Shulman (2008a; 2008b), Murphy (2009a; 2009b), and others regarding what constitutes an American Jeremiad. After identifying turning points that explain national decline (often dwelling there in an extended lamentation) jeremiads always then call for a specific set of political actions to recapture the community's founding promise, before ending on a note of hopeful exuberance. In these "war jeremiad" sermons, we see none of the disappointment and muted praise we shall see in the next section, where I interpret sermons delivered during the "afterglow" of the founding period.

RATIFICATION AND DECLINE IN "THE REPUBLIC OF THE ISRAELITES"

After the ratification of the Constitution, many of the same mainline Protestant ministers who were once so exuberant began to preach differently about the history of biblical Israel. Shalev has suggested that by the late eighteenth century the biblical history of the Israelites offered Americans "not just an argument against monarchy, but a model for their emerging polity" (Shalev 2009, 240). This shift, though, amounted to more than a sudden interest in the early phase of the Hebrew polity described in Judges when it was still kingless and, to Shalev's view, republican. Sermons given after ratification more closely resemble what Deuteronomy signals: that the role of ancient prophecies will be—to elucidate America's "true constitution." Israel's constitution did not specify institutional structures or arrangements in the way of modern constitutions

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(Elazar 1992). Deuteronomy, like other ancient constitutions, has to do with the ordering of the entire polity, not merely of its government.

The current scholarly approach has yet to capture the full political range of the sermons invoking this question of political ordering, most of all their underlying disappointment over the post-revolutionary settlement of the new Constitution. In short, the dominant note sounded by these preachers is that they see a people who are as morally flawed as they were before. To be sure, the establishment clergy frequently offered praise for the new Constitution (noting its similarity to its ancient antecedents), but their praise was always muted. While they recognized it as a significant achievement—a new republic for a new "Israel"—they were in agreement that it in no way could guarantee the nation's deliverance.

Ultimately, the ministers concluded that such deliverance could not be found in worldly affairs but rather in esoteric visions of the afterlife, what we might now call a more traditionally Christian perspective (Den Hartog 2015, 4). Just as the failure of prophetic hopes that Yahweh would restore Judah to peace and prosperity caused biblical writers to stop regarding ordinary events of history as vehicles for fulfilling God's promises, these post-revolutionary era sermons expressed the same sort of ambivalence. On the one hand, they sacralized the new legal code; on the other hand, they lamented the fact that the new Constitution was all there was to celebrate about the *Novus Ordo Seclorum*. As a result, just as ancient prophetic literature became increasingly remote from the unfolding historical crises that motivated the biblical prophets, these ministers begin to express a similar disenchantment with the world. The conclusion that human effort is futile generated a kind of prophecy whose central thrust was that only a supernatural agency could implement the prophetic visions of a glorious future.

Timothy Dwight (1752–1817) was a legendary educator, Congregational minister, theologian, and Federalist power broker from a distinguished American family. His father was a Revolutionary War hero, and he was the grandson of famed theologian Jonathan Edwards. He served with distinction during the war after Congress appointed him chaplain of the CT Continental Brigade. In 1783 he was named rector of Greenfield Hill, a Congregational church in Fairfield, CT, before succeeding Ezra Stiles as president of Yale College in 1795, a post he held until his death in 1817.

Dwight was the rare public figure who simultaneously wielded influence as a philosopher, a politician, and a theologian. His philosophical tracts against David Hume and Voltaire were widely read. His political

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

enemies referred to him as "Pope Dwight," because he wielded both the temporal sword (as head of Connecticut's Federalist Party) and the spiritual sword (as nominal head of the state's Congregational Church). Dwight also had a special talent for developing protégés, among them Lyman Beecher, Nathaniel Taylor, and Leonard Bacon, all of whom would become major religious leaders and theological innovators of the Second Great Awakening.

Dwight first came to public attention with his "Valedictory Address" of 1776, in which he described Americans as having a unique national identity as "a new people, who have the same religion, the same manners, the same interests, the same language, and the same essential forms and principles of civic government" (Spencer 1957, 3). Like many New England clergyman, by 1800 Dwight felt increasingly alienated by the political and religious culture of Jeffersonian America. Like most Federalist preachers, he saw Jefferson as an atheist who was bent on destroying America's religious heritage. He spent his final years rallying Congregational ministers in an effort to prevent the disestablishment of the church in CT. When its disestablishment was inevitable, he encouraged efforts by protégés like Beecher and Bacon to organize voluntary associations to maintain the influence of religion in public life. Dwight's "Discourse in Two Parts" (1812) was ostensibly a diatribe against the War of 1812.[19] Like all thirty-nine Federalists in Congress who voted against the war resolution, Dwight saw "Mr. Madison's War" as a sign that the end of America was nigh, both politically and cosmologically. Displaying the provincial worldview of a Federalist preacher, Dwight spun a tale of a vast, centuries-long conspiracy, which began with the French. In-between, his narrative of decline included the related consequences of a "Godless Constitution" and Deism and atheism, and ended with the apocalypse described in Revelation.

The sermon opens with Isaiah 21, "the Burden of Dumah." Hewing close to the text of Isaiah, Dwight refers to the prophet as a "watchman," who predicts and then observes the destruction of Edom, a land populated by Esau's descendants that was eventually destroyed by John Hyrcanus, a Maccabean leader of the second century BCE. For Dwight, the Edomites ultimately were done in by their infidelity and lack of gratitude—after God rewarded them with centuries of material success. In Dwight's reading, Isaiah does not intervene on their behalf, in an attempt to set the Edomites on the right course. He merely

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> marks the period of time for which the watchman was set as an inspector of the passing events. In familiar language, it was the prophet's watch, or season of watching. The morning cometh; and also the night, i.e. a season of prosperity is immediately before you, and will be succeeded by a season of adversity (Dwight 1812, 5).[20]

For Dwight the sin that was allowed to fester in modernity was Deism, "a French invention from about the middle of the sixteenth century." But it was Voltaire who "taught the modern world the worship of Abstract terms, to the exclusion of a personal deity" (Dwight, 18). Deism was so insidious for Dwight because it depersonalized the cosmos, and, in so doing, denied the possibilities of providential origins, the ongoing covenant, and millennial hope—each of which depended on a transcendent presence in the life of the nation. Ultimately, he laments,

> We formed our Constitution without any acknowledgment of God; without any recognition of his mercies to us, as a people, of his government, or even of his existence. The [Constitutional] Convention, by which it was formed, never asked, even once, his direction, or his blessing upon their labors. Thus we commenced our national existence under the present system, without God (Dwight 1812, 46).

Dwight went further than Langdon, who argued that the Constitution at least contained the right principles for a good society. Dwight conceded only that the Constitution helped establish order but left deeper questions about the nature of the American polity unanswered:

> At length, in 1788, the present Constitution, having been adopted, the present system commenced its operations; and in a good degree restored order, and stability to the public affairs of our country. The great principles, upon which we were to act as a nation, were, however, to be settled (Dwight 1812, 39).

In the rhetorical world of the post-revolutionary pulpit, the greatest threat to republican government was not population expansion, war, or runaway inflation, but infidelity to the covenant with God, an antiquated notion that was not compatible with Deism. Americans' only hope of halting their backsliding, Dwight and his ilk argued, was to turn back to the religion of New England's founders.

The atheism, the Godless Constitution, and the "Canadian War" were all interpreted by Dwight as signs of the apocalypse. He interpreted the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

present state of American affairs through the lens of Isaiah, Daniel, and Revelation. Here he displayed three hallmarks of the prophetic tradition of worldly disappointment: he described France as the "Babylon" of Revelation; his message was esoteric rather than political; he ended by claiming that the descent of America was proof that the apocalypse was nigh.

Although his treatment of France ostensibly began with a critique of the War of 1812, Dwight quickly descended into a conspiratorial diatribe about the French and the "poisons" inflicted on those who sought their military aid. After comparing France to Egypt and Assyria, two powers Israel approached for aid only to regret it, Dwight placed France within the language and context of Revelation:

> The miseries, brought upon the French nation by the Infidels, who were the agents in its republican government, soon became intolerable. The whole system was formed of a fiend-like oppression; and the empire was filled with alarm, and blood, and woe…Surrounding nations were lost in amazement when they beheld the scene. It seemed a prelude to the funeral of this great world; a stall of death; a den, into which the feet of thousands daily entered; but none were seen to return (Dwight 1812, 25).

Instead of drawing closer to "Babylon," Dwight said, America should orient itself toward its millennial destiny. Here he moves deliberately into what is known among biblical scholars as "Third" Isaiah.[21] He quotes verse 66:8, the passage cited most frequently by ministers during this era who looked to the Scriptures to correct America's course: "Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once?"

July 4, 1776 was the day God had in mind when he inspired Isaiah to record his prophecy. Since that time, American society had steadily decayed—politically, morally, and spiritually. This led Dwight to conclude that the End Times were near:

> The period in which we live, is, in my own belief, marked out in prophecy as a part of that which is included within the effusion of the seven vials. The fifth of these I consider as unquestionably poured out at the Reformation. According to this scheme, we are now under the sixth, or the seventh (Dwight 1812, 8).[22]

Dwight's sermon ended by striking the central thrust of worldly disappointment prophecy, the rejection of temporal power in favor of a

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

supernatural agency that would create new heavens and a new earth. First, Dwight dwelled on the untimely death of the last great Jewish monarch, King Josiah, one of only two political leaders who received a positive review in the two books of Kings.[23] Throughout the sermon Dwight noted the significance of the place where Israel's last great king was laid low—Megiddo—where God later gathered armies for the final battle of the end times, Armageddon.[24] At the high point of the sermon, Dwight wove together parts of passages from the Hebrew Bible and Revelation, juxtaposing temporal and celestial power: "And he gathered them into a place, called in the Hebrew tongue, Armageddon; or the mountain of Megiddo; or the mountain of the Gospel*…the place where Josiah was slain; of whom it is said, 'And like unto him there was no king before him'" (Dwight 1812, 13).[25]

Dwight's sermon is a good example of worldly disappointment prophecy found both in the Hebrew Bible and in America. While his dim assessment of the political situation in the United States might have lacked the drama and symbolism of the battles of Megiddo and Armageddon, the War of 1812 portended dark times. To a Federalist preacher like Dwight, the hope that an American Josiah would emerge had become a fool's errand. It was just so for Zechariah, one of the last Hebrew prophets, as well. He also came from a priestly family, and, while he endorsed the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple and restoration of Hebrew law, he also urged the Israelites to stop pining for a King David and look instead to the Kingdom of Heaven. Dwight, like Zechariah, believed that the temple was not enough. The people had to once again "Turn ye unto me…and I will turn unto you" (Zechariah 1:3).

In the two centuries between the royal charters of the 1600s and the federal republic of the early nineteenth century, constitutional monarchy was replaced by democratic republic, religious tests for office were eliminated at the national level, and the Federalist Party was driven from power. Yet surveying Protestant preaching in the early republic, makes it clear that, alongside the celebration of religious liberty, separation of church and state, and the privatization of religious conscience, lay a competing biblical account that was every bit as real and compelling for its hearers as the language of the Constitution. There was always more than one type of biblical rhetoric; in fact there are at least three. Together they provided ministers with a sacred language to capture the political situation at any point along the historical trajectory of the American founding.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

One is struck both by how much political sermons of the era hewed to the Hebrew Bible's rhetorical forms and by how easily these narratives can be lifted from the bible and grafted onto American soil. In the decades before the Revolutionary War, the ministers urged moral reform, and often issued stern warnings against political resistance. When it became clear that armed conflict was unavoidable, they shifted to the Jeremiad, the battle cry for war. Finally, in the aftermath of the Constitutional Convention, when the imprimatur of leading clergy was particularly sought after, often it was only two cheers at most for the *Novus Ordo Seclorum*.

Thomas Prince's sermon reflected the long shadow of American Puritanism, the "declensive style," as Perry Miller famously put it (Miller 1953). Prince and Phillips took as their reality the still familiar biblical images of Creator and creation, of fallen and sinful men who strove anxiously in a mysteriously ordered existence in which eschatological fulfillment was a middling proposition at best. More importantly, for these ministers the political fate of the colonies lay wholly in God's hands. They urged only moral reform as an end in itself, not as the necessary precondition for political transformation that the "war ministers" would claim it to be. The American war sermons reflected the same subtle but critically important shift in ancient Hebrew prophecy. Like their pre-revolutionary war forerunners, wartime ministers warned the people of impending punishment for their disloyalty to God. However, they also added the distinct feature of a revolutionary horizon. They could imagine a time after the war ended, when Americans would be released from "Babylon." These sermons present the full range of the jeremiadic register: doom as the first but not the last word, moral reform as a key to demonstrating fealty to God, and trust in God as ultimately the most important thing. But they also urged patriots to dig in and prepare for the long struggle. Through this, they were able to catch a glimpse into The Promised Land.

Finally, sermons given after ratification more closely resemble what Deuteronomy signals that the role of ancient prophecies will be—to elucidate America's "true constitution." Perhaps this is closer to what Madison meant when he called the Bible "the cloudy medium." In the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, for example, the disappointment after the Israelites reclaim the Holy Land is represented by the metaphor of the Jerusalem temple. Although the Jews returned from Babylon in 538 and laid the foundation for a new sanctuary on the site of Solomon's Temple, there was little enthusiasm to complete the temple, and 20 years later the project was abandoned. Older Israelites who remembered the glories of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Solomon's Temple were especially disappointed. They had anticipated so much more.[26] Dwight and his ilk were as deeply disenchanted with America as these prophets had often been with Israel—ironically, in both cases, after they had reached the promised land.

CONCLUSION

There were at least three varieties of Old Testament rhetoric in use during the American founding era. Inherited from their Puritan ancestors, these prophetic forms endured because they provided ministers with a sacred language to capture the political situation at any point along the historical trajectory of the American founding. But in addition, recognizing the richness of the rhetorical landscape might help us understand why the ancient tropes, metaphors, and soaring poetry of the Bible have endured far beyond the American founding. Four hundred years later, in an increasingly secular nation, the Hebrew Prophets continue to provide orators on all sides of the political spectrum with the multiple registers of American prophecy, what Sacvan Bercovitch once called "The Music of America" (Bercovitch 1993).

For example, early on in the presidency of George W. Bush, both quantitative and qualitative scholars were quick to point out that Bush used a "distinctive prophetic mode of religious expression more often than any modern predecessor" (Smith 2008, 272). This was especially the case in speeches regarding American foreign policy following the attacks of September 11th. This immediately renewed the debate over whether prophetic speech is consistent with any defensible notion of "public reason," or whether Bush was speaking providentially and assuming a fore-ordained national destiny communicated to him from on high (Coe and Domke 2006). But if we compare Bush's First Inaugural Address (delivered prior to September 11th) with his State of the Union Address in 2002, we see that, while both utilize prophetic registers and tropes, they demonstrate very different types of prophecy. Quoting VA Page's letter to Jefferson, in the inaugural President Bush says,

> Do you not think an angel rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm… We are not this story's author, who fills time and eternity with His purpose. America at its best is a place where personal responsibility is valued and expected. Encouraging responsibility is not a search for scapegoats; it is a call to conscience. And though it requires sacrifice, it brings a deeper fulfillment (Bush 2001).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

It is understandable why Smith and others have seen the prophetic rhetoric of Bush's inaugural as incompatible with democratic discourse. The phrase "we are not the story's author" is jarring in a democratic public sphere. While that may be true (I am not weighing in on that debate here), it is equally important to note that in this address the newly elected President is advocating only inward-looking prescriptions, of repentance and personal responsibility, as the means of fulfilling America's national destiny. Contrast this with President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address, his first after the 9–11 attacks, where he stated, "History has called America" to "fight" and "lead" the campaign for liberty and justice. Summoning the full force of the American Jeremiad, Bush declared, "In a single instant, we realized that this will be a decisive decade in the history of liberty, that we've been called to a unique role in human events…many have discovered again that even in tragedy—especially in tragedy—God is near" (Bush 2002).[27]

On the opposite end of the prophetic register, conservative commentator and devout Eastern Orthodox Christian Rod Dreher[28] demonstrates the prophetic narrative of disappointment. In his writings about the "Benedict Option," the idea that Christians who want to maintain their faith should segregate themselves to some degree from a "post-Obergefell society," Dreher laments that the religious right has irretrievably lost the culture wars and must now retreat from politics:

> Christians should not be under the illusion that the fight is primarily political, or that there is a political solution. The challenges are so massive and protean that I don't think it's possible to discern a comprehensive vision of the near-future, much less formulate a battle plan. They gave it their best, heaven knows, but their battle plan presumed that the Christian basis of Western thought and life would hold (Dreher 2019).

Dreher's narrative here is a prolonged lamentation over the failure of the long struggle to Christianize American liberalism. Now that politics is foreclosed, Dreher insists, the faith community must look inward for meaning and to the heavens for salvation.

Finally, the tripartite typology of biblical prophecy might help us understand why Evangelical Christians have been so fiercely loyal to President Trump. While a transactional explanation might explain the bulk of the broad Evangelical support the President currently enjoys, his regular appeals to "forgotten Americans" as well as the slogan "Together we will make America great again," constitute a jeremiad which articulates

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a narrative of national decline followed by an exhortation to take action, after 8 years of "exile" under President Obama. Further, some commentators are bewildered regarding how so many Evangelicals are able to justify looking past the President's public lack of personal religious faith and unwillingness to extend Christian civility toward his political opponents. They need look no further than the Hebrew Bible for examples of political leaders like the Persian King Cyrus, heroes who are deeply flawed characters. Scarcely a devotee of the God of Israel, Cyrus served as God's agent by authorizing Jewish exiles in Babylon to return to the Promised Land and rebuild the temple to YHWH.[29] Within weeks of the presidential election, some American pastors were using biblical texts about Cyrus to declare confidently that President Trump's election was God's answer for a nation off course. They cited the prophet Isaiah, who said of King Cyrus, "He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure…whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him" (Stewart 2018).[30]

Identifying the three modes of Hebraic prophecy helps us explain why, in an increasingly secular nation, the American Biblical tradition endures. These ancient rhetorical forms are remarkably adaptable to a wide range of historical periods and to a wide variety of political ends. The usage of all three prophetic narratives is likely to continue as long as a significant number of Americans remain familiar with the Bible and participate in political life.

NOTES

* I would like to thank the journal editors and anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions, and John McMahon for his patience, generosity and constructive critique.

1. Several of the founders were students of the Bible, and a few even wrote Bible commentaries as well as involved discourses on Christian doctrine and practice. Among the prominent founders who wrote about Christian theology and doctrines are Elias Boudinot, John Dickinson, Oliver Ellsworth, John Jay, Benjamin Rush, Roger Sherman, and John Witherspoon (Goldman 1993).

2. In the Jewish canon of scripture, the term for "Prophet" is "Navi." (Navi'im plural). However, eighteenth century ministers would have referred to this Biblical genre as the "Fifteen Books of prophets," as that is how they appeared in Protestant Bibles.

3. Its Greek equivalent, *prophetes*, from which the English word is derived, means "a person speaking for God." (See Shulman 2008a; 2008b, 3; Harris 2011, 166).

4. Although Israelite prophecy began before the time of King Saul (eleventh century BCE), it was not until the mid-eighth century BCE that scribes began the process of assembling oracles under the individual prophets' names and preserving them in written form.

5. Elliot West argues that political sermons were second only to colonial newspapers in successfully disseminating propaganda. See West (1974, 445).

6. A similar debate appears in scholarship about the role of prophecy during the Civil Rights movement. Chappell (2005) argues that "irrational" prophetic ideas are what truly fueled the movement, whereas others have argued that prophecy was one of the means by which liberal ideas were communicated.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

7. Lockridge estimates that one-quarter of the generation born around I730 was illiterate, but that the stories in the Bible were very familiar to them, as a staple of regular Sunday sermons (Lockridge 1974, 87).

8. They analyzed approximately 2,200 items with explicitly political content, including books, pamphlets, newspaper articles, and monographs, excluding anything that remained private and did not enter public consciousness such as letters and notes (Hyneman and Lutz, 1983).

9. This does not count the scores of itinerant preachers who travelled throughout the region offering sermons, sometimes in the churches, other times in town squares.

10. In the narrative of the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Judges covers the time between the conquest described in the Book of Joshua and the establishment of a kingdom in the Books of Samuel, during which Biblical judges served as temporary leaders. Although the leaders of the confederacy are portrayed as heroes who rescue Israel from distress, its evaluation of the confederacy is negative because its institutions are not strong enough to reliably deliver the benefits of nationhood.

11. Contemporary scholars refer to Deuteronomy-2 Kings (minus Ruth) as "the Deuteronomistic History," but no one before the mid-20th century understood these books as a unified whole. In Protestant and Catholic Bibles, these books are among "the Historical Books" (including Ruth), not among the prophetic texts (Navi'im), as in the Jewish canon.

12. Prince is but one example from a very distinguished group. Similar ideas can be found in several pre-war sermons such as Benjamin Colman's, "Government the Pillar of the Earth" (1730), Joseph Sewall, "Nineveh's Repentance and Deliverance" (1740), Charles Chauncy, "Civil Magistrates Must Be Just, Ruling In the Fear of God" (1747), and Samuel Dunbar, "The Presence of God With His People" (1760).

13. The sermon was retitled "The People of New England Put In Mind of the Righteous Acts of the Lord To Them and Their Fathers, and Reasoned With Concerning Them," when it was published in 1730 by B. Green Publisher (Boston, MA).

14. Typology in Christian theology and Biblical exegesis is a doctrine or theory concerning the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament. Events, persons, or statements in the Old Testament are seen as types pre-figuring or superseded by antitypes (events or aspects of Christ or his revelation) described in the New Testament. For a fuller treatment of Typology in Puritan theology and early American Protestantism, see Williams (1987), especially pp. 36–38.

15. At Harvard, his unwavering support of independence alienated his many Tory students, ultimately causing him to resign.

16. "Government Corrupted by Vice" was published as a twenty-nine-page pamphlet by John Draper soon after it was delivered. According to Nathan R. Perl-Rosenthal (2009) it is the only known public discussion of the constitution of the Hebrew Republic in the revolutionary period before the publication of Common Sense.

17. The phrase "Setting up or pulling down" of kings is a paraphrase of two closely-related sections of Jeremiah: 1:10 and 24:6.

18. Here Langdon is quoting from Psalm 41. See also Jeremiah 29:17–19 and 30:7–10; Ezekiel 39.

19. This sermon is the lengthiest of any published sermon at the beginning of the war and received the widest circulation, being printed in New Haven, New York City, Utica, Boston and Andover, Massachusetts, and even Lexington, Kentucky. Because Dwight was one of the most prominent clergymen in New England, publishers clearly saw a marketable commodity. For a fuller accounting of the publication history and political impact of Dwight's sermons see Imholt (2013).

20. The biblical passage itself is terse and mysterious which makes it difficult to make solid statements about whether Isaiah actually did or did not intervene. But it is clear that Dwight believed that Isaiah merely observed.

21. Isaiah was actually written and then redacted into three distinct parts. What biblical scholars call First Isaiah was written in the pre-exilic period; Second Isaiah was and exilic text; Third Isaiah was composed after the return from the Babylonian exile.

22. In Revelation, the sixth seal, seventh trumpet, and seventh vial all describe the same set of events that occur during the period just prior to, and immediately following the second coming of Christ. These events are the culmination of God's wrath upon the earth.

23. The other king is Hezekiah. See 2 Kings 18–22; Isaiah 36–39.

24. This Greek word was adapted from the Hebrew *Har Megiddô*, the "Mountain of Megiddo."

25. See II Kings 23:25

26. Haggai 2:3–7; Zechariah 1–6.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

27. Coe and Domke refer to these two types of rhetoric as "petitioning" (asking for God's grace) and Prophesying (stating God's will), but do not situate them within their biblical genres.
28. Dreher began as a Methodist, converted to Roman Catholicism in 1993, before announcing his conversion to Eastern Orthodoxy in 2006.
29. According to Ezra 1:1–4, in fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer. 29:1–14), shortly after Cyrus assumed the rule of Babylon, the Persian king issued a decree authorizing the Judean exiles to return home and to rebuild the Temple of YHWH—with the aid of resources he provided.
30. Isaiah 44:28–45:1

REFERENCES

Ahlstrom, Sydney E. 1972. *A Religious History of the American People*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Bercovitch, Sacvan. 1978. *The American Jeremiad*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Bercovitch, Sacvan. 1993. *The Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America*. New York: Routledge.

Bloch, Ruth H. 1985. *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought 1756–1800*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bloch, Ruth H. 2007. "Religion and Ideological Change in the American Revolution." In *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, eds. Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 47–63.

Bonomi, Patricia U. 2003. *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bush, George W. 2001. "First Inaugural Address" at https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/inaugural-address-52 (Accessed August 11, 2019).

Bush, George W. 2002. "1st State of the Union Address," January 29, 2002, at https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-before-joint-session-the-congress-the-state-the-union-22. (Accessed August 11, 2019).

Chappell, David L. 2005. *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Coe, Kevin, and David, Domke. 2006. "Petitioners or Prophets? Presidential Discourse, God, and the Ascendancy of Religious Conservatives." *Journal of Communication* 56:309–330.

Den Hartog, Jonathan J. 2015. *Patriotism and Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

Dreher, Rod. 2019. "Benedict Option: What Else Is There?" The American Conservative, April 14, 2019. at https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/benedict-option-what-else-is-there/ (Accessed August 13, 2019).

Dwight, Timothy. 1812. *A Discourse in Two Parts*. New Haven: Howe and Deforest.

Elazar, Daniel J. 1992. "Deuteronomy as Israel's Ancient Constitution: Some Preliminary Reflections." http://www.jcpa.org/dje/articles2/deut-const.htm (Accessed August 9, 2019).

Glaude, Eddie. 2011. "On Prophecy and Critical Intelligence." *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 32(2):105–21.

Goldman, Shalom. 1993. *Hebrew and the Bible in America: The First Two Centuries*. Hanover, NH: Brandeis/Dartmouth.

Gutterman, David S. 2005. *Prophetic Politics: Christian Social Movements and American Democracy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Hanska, Jan. 2009. “Prophetic Politics—Leadership Based on the Stories of a Golden Past and a Glorious Future.” *Perspectives* 17(2):93–117.

Harris, Stephen L. 2011. *Understanding the Bible*. 8th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hyneman, Charles S., and Donald S. Lutz, eds. 1983. *American Political Writing During the Founding Era, 1760–1805*. 2 vols. Indianapolis: Liberty Press.

Imholt, Robert J. 2013. “The Fast Day Sermons of Timothy Dwight.” *Connecticut History* 52(1):75.

Kaveny, Cathleen. 2016. *Prophecy Without Contempt: Religious Discourse in the Public Square*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Kosmin, Barry A., and Seymour Lachman. 1993. *One Nation Under God: Religion in Contemporary American Society*. New York: Harmony Books.

Kramnick, Isaac, and R. Laurence Moore. 2005. *The Godless Constitution: A Moral Defense of the Secular State*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Langdon, Samuel. 1862. “Government Corrupted By Vice.” In *The Patriot Preachers of the American Revolution*, ed. Frank Moore. New York: C. T. Evans, 49–74.

Library of Congress. “Religion and the American Revolution—Religion and the Founding of the American Republic|Exhibitions (Library of Congress)” http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel03.html (Accessed June 15, 2017).

Lockridge, Kenneth A. 1974. *Literacy in Colonial New England; An Enquiry Into the Social Context of Literacy in the Early Modern West*. New York: Norton.

Lutz, Donald S. 1988. *The Origins of American Constitutionalism*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Lutz, Donald S. 1992. *A Preface to American Political Theory*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

Madison, James. 2003. “Federalist #37.” In *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter. New York: Signet Classics, 225–227.

McWilliams, Wilson Carey. 1984. “The Bible in the American Political Tradition.” In *Religion and Politics*, ed. Myron J. Aronoff. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 11–46.

Miller, Perry. 1953. “Errand Into The Wilderness.” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 10:4–32.

Murphy, Andrew R. 2009a. *Prodigal Nation: Moral Decline and Divine Punishment From New England to 9/11*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Murphy, Andrew R. 2009b. “Longing, Nostalgia, and Golden Age Politics: The American Jeremiad and the Power of the Past.” *Perspectives on Politics* 7(March 2009):125–41.

Noll, Mark A. 1982. “The Image of the United States as a Biblical Nation, 1776–1865.” In *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, eds. Nathan O. Hatch, George Mardsen and Mark A. Noll. New York: Oxford University Press, 39–58.

Noll, Mark A. 1999. “Was the Revolutionary War Justified?,” Christianity Today, February 8, 1999, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1999/february8/9t2070.html?paging=off. (Accessed June 15, 2017).

Perl-Rosenthal, Nathan R. (2009). “The ‘Divine Right of Republics’: Hebraic Republicanism and the Debate Over Kingless Government in Revolutionary America.” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 66(3):535–564.

Prince, Thomas. 1968. “The People of New England.” In *The Wall and the Garden: Selected Massachusetts Election Sermons*, eds. A. W. Plumstead. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1670–1775.

Remer, Gary 2009. “The Relationship Between Biblical Prophet and Roman Orator: The Limits of Preaching and Prudence.” *Hebraic Political Studies* 4(1):25–55.

Rogers, Melvin L. 2015. “David Walker and the Political Power of the Appeal.” *Political Theory* 43(2):208–233.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Sandoz, Ellis. 1998. *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730–1805*. 2 vols. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund.

Shalev, Eran. 2009. "Perfect Republic': The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775–1788." *New England Quarterly* 82(2):235–263.

Shalev, Eran. 2013. *American Zion: The Hebrew Bible as a Political Text From the Revolution to the Civil War*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Shulman, George. 2008a. "Thinking Authority Democratically: Prophetic Practices, White Supremacy, and Democratic Politics." *Political Theory* 36(5) (October 2008):708–734.

Shulman, George. 2008b. *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press.

Smith, Rogers M. 2008. "Religious Rhetoric and the Ethics of Public Discourse: The Case of George W. Bush." *Political Theory* 36(2):272–300.

Spencer, Benjamin. 1957. *The Quest for Nationality: An American Literary Campaign*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Stewart, Katherine. 2018. "Why Trump Reigns as King Cyrus." The New York Times. December 31, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/31/opinion/trump-evangelicals-cyrus-king.html?auth=login-email&login=email (Accessed August 15, 2019).

Stout, Harry S. 1986. *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Walzer, Michael. 1987. "The Prophet as a Social Critic." In *Interpretation and Social Criticism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 67–94.

West, Elliott. 1974. "Thomas Prince and New England History." *Journal of Church and State* 16(3):435–451.

Williams, David R. 1987. *Wilderness Lost: The Religious Origins of the American Mind*. Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000024 Published online by Cambridge University Press