

The author mentions Episcopal Bishop Benjamin Onderdonk of New York City, who married several black couples and otherwise embraced the African American members of white parishes. Nonetheless, Alexander Crummell, a black ordinand, was denied admission to General Theological Seminary largely because of the bishop's opposition. While the author refers to Onderdonk's acts of racial inclusivity, he is unmentioned in connection to Crummell's seminary exclusion. The election of bishops in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the ascension of ecclesial leaders in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and their frontline advocacy for black rights stood in sharp contrast to Onderdonk's racial vacillation.

The precedent of interracial worship in the eighteenth century portended no decrease in societal developments in the early nineteenth century that restricted most African Americans to chattel slavery and a small minority of free persons to limited liberties. Such black polemicists as David Walker and such Indian critics as William Apess denounced the discrimination visited upon their peoples. Because Indian churches did not expand as broadly as black churches, the latter became the principal venues for protest and resistance. White churches that included blacks and Indians scarcely tolerated such insurgencies.

Interracial worship, while commonplace in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, requires from the author a significant clarification. What he cites as interracial is actually a persistence of small numbers dwarfed by majority white parishioners. Among select congregations, the numbers of blacks and Indians either were in the single digits or in the very low double digits. Never did they threaten the numerical superiority of whites. Viewed in the aggregate of several congregations over time, however, the numbers seemed impressive. In rare instances, the miniscule number of black and Indian ministers who served white congregations or participated in governance, while important, did not undermine white ecclesial authority. Hardly any of these interracial churches included a critical mass of blacks and Indians, and so few had enough members to spur a "tipping point" that stirred dramatic action from whites. While the small numbers of blacks and Indians often necessitated their segregation within the sanctuary, when substantive increases of blacks occurred, raw racist actions resulted. When this happened at St. George Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, their physical mistreatment moved Richard Allen and Absalom Jones to bolt and found two separate black congregations. Nonetheless, this book still changes the discourse about black religion in the early American North. The prevalence of an interracial demography in a cross section of Protestant churches concomitant with the early presence of Indian churches and the rise of independent black churches enriches the scholarly discourse about the diverse makeup of Christianity in the colonial and early national period.

Dennis C. Dickerson
Vanderbilt University
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***David Friedrich Strauss, Father of Unbelief: An Intellectual Biography.* By Frederick C. Beiser. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. x + 293 pp. \$85.00 hardcover.**

David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874) has been almost forgotten in the Anglophone world by everyone but scholars, laments Frederick C. Beiser. He sets out to correct

this state of affairs by offering a detailed and comprehensive intellectual biography which also succeeds in placing Strauss and his impact firmly in the context of the social and political life of nineteenth-century Germany. Strauss had a striking influence on German intellectual life. *Das Leben Jesu*, published in two volumes in 1835, caused a sensation and severely damaged the Protestant conviction that the Bible was God's literal revealed truth. The political implications of this critique were significant, for confidence in the Bible as God's infallible word was the foundation of the Protestant concept of a divinely ordained state. This helps explain the shock that the work caused in Germany, for it seemed to undermine the theological principles which underpinned the social and political order. *Das Leben Jesu* was, writes Beiser, "the most controversial German publication of the entire nineteenth century" (8), and it had more influence on the decline of religion than Darwin's *Origin of Species*.

What exactly was so controversial about *Das Leben Jesu*? In brief, Strauss attacked the historical credibility of the New Testament and argued that, far from being reliable history, it was essentially myth. In a context where, since the Reformation, German Protestants had emphasized the veracity of the "plain" or literal sense of scripture, this argument was shocking both to the establishment and to the general population. The implications for Strauss were profound. Although he had studied at the famous Protestant *Stift* in Tübingen and even taught philosophy there, he was now perceived by conservatives as a dangerous radical, and his hopes of becoming a Protestant pastor or a university professor were ruined. While continuing to write and publish, he led a lonely and peripatetic life, moving from one German city to another, never finding stability or peace. The precedent of Lessing, who was censured after publishing the *Fragments* of Reimarus in 1772, provided some slight consolation to the shunned Strauss.

Strauss was not the first to employ the concept of myth in analyzing texts, but he was the first to employ it in a systematic way to the form and content of the Gospels. Influenced by the thought of Hegel, whose lectures he attended in Berlin shortly before the great philosopher died of cholera (news Strauss heard in person from the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher), Strauss struggled with the question of faith and reason and the relationship, so crucial in Hegelian thought, between concrete religion and speculative idealism. Beiser concludes that while Strauss's speculative theology in *Das Leben Jesu* is dependent upon Hegel's philosophy, his historical approach, "both in its methods and results, is independent of it" (61). Beiser's treatment of the Hegelian context of both Strauss's thought and nineteenth century German intellectual and political life is lucid and free of jargon.

In *Das Leben Jesu*, Strauss argued that the mythical elements in the Gospels originated in the messianic traditions of the Old Testament; Jesus fulfilled these expectations by his miracles and healings and thus came to be seen as the messiah. Such myths, argued Strauss, are not consciously created but arise from what he called "the spirit of a nation or community" (70). This so-called *Volkgeist* theory helped Strauss in his attempt to explain why people continue to believe in things like miracles or the divinity of Christ against all the evidence; the myths have a social and political function which upholds the ideas or values of a community. As Beiser puts it, "the justification of the beliefs is more pragmatic than logical; they serve our ends or ideals, even if they happen to be false" (71). Strauss's theory of myth, which he continued to refine, moved away from the Protestant stress on the individual believer towards an emphasis on the cultural context of religion and its role in shaping the social and political worlds

of which the individual is only a part (72). It can thus be seen as a forerunner of later anthropological and sociological theories of religion.

Beiser offers a thorough analysis of the reaction to *Das Leben Jesu*. Most reaction was hostile and the bitter polemics which ensued cost Strauss many friendships. Over time, Strauss moved further away from Christianity and Hegelianism toward naturalism and historicism. This intellectual journey—including his engagement with politics—is laid out by Beiser in chapters broken down into helpful subsections. *Die christliche Glaubenslehre* (1840–1841), considered by many to be more significant in Strauss's thought than *Das Leben Jesu*, examined the core teachings of Christian dogmas and concluded that they lack any historical or rational foundation (147). The true critique of dogma, argued Strauss, is its history, and that history ends in the dissolution of the dogma. As Beiser notes astutely, there is no culminating Hegelian synthesis here (151). In 1864, after twenty years of silence on theology, Strauss published *Das Leben Jesu für das deutsche Volk bearbeitet*, which Beiser considers a far clearer statement of Strauss's position than the 1835 version. Beiser's analysis of the 1864 book is superb and shows that by then Strauss's naturalism and historicism had led him to believe that only the ethical core of Christianity should remain; no dogmas or ministers were required. It was a direct appeal to the German laity; if the Strauss of 1835 had hoped to join the Protestant clerical establishment, the Strauss of 1864 was intent on destroying it (237).

The first publication of *Das Leben Jesu* caused a storm, but the version of 1864 made scarcely a ripple. As Beiser comments, by then, many in Germany saw the whole religious *Weltanschauung* as antiquated, and a critique of religious revelation was taken for granted. "Are we still Christians?" asked Strauss in his final book, *Der alte und der neue Glaube* (1872). By then, to a great extent due to his influence, many were not. In a final flourish, Beiser offers a short study of three late critics of Strauss, including a four-page tour de force on Nietzsche's prejudiced treatment of Strauss. It is a fitting completion to this outstanding intellectual biography of "the father of unbelief."

James Byrne
Saint Michael's College
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***From Virginia Slave to African Statesman: Hilary Teage (1805–1853)*. By C. Patrick Burrowes. Bomi County: Know Yourself, 2019. xviii + 180 pp. \$19.95 paper; \$9.95 e-book.**

This short book—104 pages of text followed by extensive notes—describes the life of Hilary Teage, called the "Jefferson of Liberia" for his role in drafting the Liberian Declaration of Independence. The author's goal is to draw out of obscurity this exceptional figure, totally forgotten in the historical record, and to shed light on his role in founding the Liberian republic. Teage's writings are the author's main source of biographical information.

Even though the table of contents lists what appear to be chapter headings, the book is structured as one continuous narrative divided into nine sections. In "A Very Superior Man," Burrowes introduces Teage as a resourceful, creative, and passionate figure who used the *Liberia Herald* newspaper to advocate for Liberian independence and