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RELIGION IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC: A SECOND TOM PAINE EFFECT

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Eric R. Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013)

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

Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015)

Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013)

Tom Paine, it turns out, may have done almost as much to shape public discourse in the early national period of the United States as he did in moving aggrieved colonists to take up arms against King George III in the Revolutionary period. As historians have documented time and again, the arguments in Paine's *Common Sense* (1776), especially "On Monarchy and Hereditary Succession," worked as an elixir to transform mixed opinions about dealing with Parliamentary overreach into an unalloyed determination to throw off the king. The four books reviewed here point to the same sort of conclusion about the importance of Paine's *The Age of Reason*, published in two parts in 1794 and 1795 and then reprinted almost as often over the next few years as *Common Sense* had been at the outset of the War of Independence. With the latter work, however, Paine accomplished more through the opposition he generated than by the readers he convinced. Although a few doughty Loyalists had ventured to take on *Common Sense*, that opposition was as nothing compared to the groundswell of denunciation that arose in the 1790s to defuse what Americans of many stripes considered Paine's incendiary provocations. Thoroughly researched and persuasively argued monographs from Eric Schlereth, Jonathan Den Hartog, and Sam Haselby provide, in effect, an account of why *The Age of Reason* caused such a stir, how those who regarded its arguments as threatening damnation for individuals

and poison for the republic mobilized for their own counterpurposes, and then what resulted from the ambiguous success that this mobilization achieved.

Eran Shalev's study of Hebrew scripturalism in the first two generations of national history focuses on the cultural object whose centrality explains why *Common Sense* had been so successful, why *The Age of Reason* created such an uproar, and why an American public that had decisively rejected the latter Tom Paine found itself beset by new controversies—not this time justifying national independence or creating a national culture, but contending over the continued existence of slavery in the land of liberty that the earlier Tom Paine had done so much to create.

That object was the Bible. As Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, Eric Nelson, and James Byrd have recently demonstrated, it was Paine's persuasive exegesis of a passage from 1 Samuel 8 (where Yahweh denounced Israel when it asked for a king) that in 1776 convinced many colonists of the need to reject monarchy in order to secure a republican government and the blessings of liberty promised by such government.[1] In the mid-1790s, the dozens of rebuttals generated by *The Age of Reason* concentrated on defending the reputation of Scripture, which Paine had denounced in no uncertain terms: "it would be more consistent that we called [the Bible] the word of a demon, than the word of God. It is a history of wickedness, that has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind."[2] The Bible likewise loomed large in the great evangelical mobilization that, at least in partial response to Paine, overwhelmed the threat of deism and nearly succeeded in making Protestant mores the informal law of the land. Almost immediately, however, contrasting views about *how* to follow scriptural teaching fragmented the new nation's evangelical movements—some constructing national voluntary societies to accomplish their mixed religious and civic aspirations, others regarding these national ventures as a new form of quasi-imperial tyranny. Then in the sectional conflict that flared from the 1830s forward, disputes over what the Bible taught about slavery generated renewed public controversy, but only because Scripture had earlier become so important in the construction of the new nation's public life.

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1 Nathan R. Perl-Rosenthal, "The 'Divine Right of Republics': Hebriac Republicanism and the Debate over Kingless Government in Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 66/3 (2009), 535–64; Eric Nelson, "Hebraism and the Republican Turn in 1776: A Contemporary Account of the Debate over *Common Sense*," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 70/4 (2013), 781–812; James P. Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution* (New York, 2013), 71, 202–3 n. 81.

2 Paine *The Age of Reason*, in *Selected Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Ian Shapiro and Jane C. Calvert (New Haven, 2014), 372–417, at 382.

Taken together, the four books under review offer an unusually cohesive account of the intermingled social, political, and religious forces in early American history where almost all participants manifestly believed in the power of ideas to strengthen or corrupt the national experiment in republican self-government. An account of what the books accomplish, when considered separately, prepares the way for considering briefly why they reveal so much about the central, but contested, place of Scripture in early national history.

* * *

Eric Schlereth's *Age of Infidels* refines several of the important arguments made recently in important works by Christopher Grasso and Amanda Porterfield.[3] Where Grasso emphasizes the long trajectory of skeptical "religious common sense" from the Revolution to the Civil War and where Porterfield pinpoints theological and political panic as the motor that overthrew deism in the two decades between the publication of *The Age of Reason* and the War of 1812, Schlereth explains how controversies over skeptical or deist ideas created public norms for religious–civic interaction. His wide-ranging research shows convincingly that Paine-ite deism generated considerable enthusiasm, but also much fervent opposition, during the 1790s and the early nineteenth century. He also sheds welcome light on a modest, but much noticed, resurgence of deist or anti-Christian "free enquiry" that took place from the mid-1820s into the next decade. In the earlier period, Schlereth highlights the efforts of Elihu Palmer, an ex-Presbyterian minister who gained notoriety in Philadelphia for anticlerical and deistic polemics several years before Paine's *The Age of Reason* appeared. He also features Paine's much-rebutted work, along with a number of local authors and organizers like those who founded Philadelphia's Society of Theophilanthropists with rituals, in imitation of the guiding spirits of the French Revolution, that celebrated a deist form of humanistic religion. For the latter period, Schlereth's "infidels" are the editors of short-lived newspapers like the *Free Inquirer* of New York and the *Western Examiner* of St Louis; utopian reformers like Robert Dale Owen and Frances Wright; organizers of Tom Paine birthday celebrations, which began in 1825; and the crowds that for several years patronized the Hall of Science in New York City. While Schlereth acknowledges that the forces arrayed against either earlier deism or later "free enquiry" always vastly outnumbered those who promoted these post-Christian convictions, he

[3] Christopher Grasso, "Deist Common Sense in the Wake of the American Revolution," *Journal of American History*, 95/1 (2008), 43–68; Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago, 2012).

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also shows that controversies fueled by the radicals exerted a broad effect on the nation as a whole.

Schlereth's most important contribution is his account of how the deist challenge, along with responses, decisively influenced the way Americans came to relate religion and civic life in the cultural uncertainty of a post-Revolutionary world. The citizenry, having embraced the principle of religious liberty and having embarked on a course heading rapidly toward complete church disestablishment, nevertheless still contained substantial (and growing) numbers who wanted to maintain a Christian social influence without the formal infrastructure of European Christendom. In Schlereth's reading, public controversies stimulated by "infidels" created the playing field on which Americans fashioned new rules for organizing, civilizing, and directing the new nation.

These controversies had at least three significant repercussions. First, they turned discussion of religion in an instrumental direction, where the focus increasingly shifted "from content to context" (17). When participants in the civil sphere debated the *effects on society* of religious belief or nonbelief rather than the *truth claims* of those beliefs, it allowed them to shape society while maintaining a commitment to religious freedom. In this arena, defense of the Bible against skeptics like Palmer or Paine became important not only, or not even primarily, because Scripture showed humans the way to God but because it provided the necessary resources for supporting the personal virtue without which republics must fail.

Similarly, the means used to argue about these matters—pamphlets, locally organized societies, periodicals, and above all newspapers—made persuasive argumentation the prime means to influence civic order. In the unfolding American experiment, it was no longer top-down, state-guided coercion, but bottom-up, citizen-directed mobilization that controlled public opinion. Hence, in a public sphere shaped by the free exercise of expression, the radicals' well-publicized efforts, which attacked Scripture as immoral and socially dangerous, provoked the many popular defenses of traditional Protestant Christianity that eventually carried the day.[4]

Third, the broad American commitment to a republican understanding of the world—which assumed that a healthy social order required self-directed virtuous citizens—led opponents of deism to promote innovative plans for educating all children. Specifically, these plans featured regular reading of the King James Bible as the keystone of public education. In Schlereth's view, attacks on Scripture

[4] Schlereth thus counters arguments that highlight elitist responsibility for the new nation's religious character, as in David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (New York, 2011); and Steven K. Green, *Inventing a Christian America: The Myth of the Religious Founding* (New York, 2015), esp. 199–241 ("The Birth of a Myth").

by Paine and other early deists prompted the Protestant sects to subordinate differences over biblical interpretation in favor of unified efforts at defending a nonsectarian Bible as crucial for public well-being. For the later period, when advocacy of deist-like "free enquiry" proliferated, that challenge evoked even stronger countervailing efforts to exalt this nonsectarian Protestant Bible as a mainstay of republican well-being.

So it was that "the age of infidels" led to religion treated instrumentally, public opinion guided by a free press, and the Bible defended as the foundation of republican government. Schlereth views much that followed as an outgrowth of what infidels and their opponents initiated. The linkage of private religion and public morality created a landscape where those who contended over slavery, women's rights, and temperance "were forced to pursue absolute moral claims in a political culture that valued persuasion and public opinion" (240). In turn, when the immigration of Roman Catholics increased, the "earlier controversies over infidelity provided pious Americans with lessons, practice, and methods for challenging Catholicism" (241). Even more dramatically, a heritage of opposition to deism allowed Protestants who defended slavery on the basis of the Bible to call their opponents "infidels" for deviating from the letter of the sacred text.

Schlereth's account of well-publicized religious radicalism may not explain quite as much of early national culture as he claims. The book's concentration on the era of Tom Paine and then on the years surrounding 1830 means that important developments from President Thomas Jefferson's second term to the rise of Andrew Jackson receive little attention, like the dramatic expansion of the largely apolitical Methodists, the effects of the War of 1812, and strife among the nation's main Protestant movements over what Schlereth calls "organized evangelical religion" (143). *An Age of Infidels* nonetheless makes for a tellingly effective work by showing how the religious controversies it examines contributed powerfully to the civic life of the new nation.

* * *

Jonathan Den Hartog's *Politics and Piety* nicely complements Eric Schlereth's book, not by examining the effects of religious agitation on politics and broader cultural norms, but by treating the effects of political change on religion and those same cultural norms. Beginning with several of the individuals who led the charge against Paine's *The Age of Reason*, Den Hartog illuminates the success, but also the ironies, in their triumph over the United States' early "infidels." For political historians, the book explains how Federalists participated in the religious conflicts of the early national period, how they exploited those conflicts for partisan political purposes, but then how they eventually turned aside from electoral politics. For the history of politics-and-religion, Den Hartog demonstrates the

importance of actively religious Federalists who advanced the voluntary style of social organization that did so much to shape American society. In this reading, Federalists lost out to Democratic Republicans politically, but forged a cultural triumph out of a political failure.

Den Hartog exploits archives in at least six states to trace the lives of eleven major Federalist leaders for whom religion in one form or another played an important public role. By foregrounding their religious convictions, he can trace a three-stage political progression. During the Revolutionary and Constitutional periods, most Federalists supported what they considered a nonpartisan platform of "Christian Republicanism." Influential politicians like John Adams and John Jay, along with influential ministers like Timothy Dwight in Connecticut and Jedidiah Morse in Massachusetts, defended principles of religious freedom but also sought some kind of structured connection between the churches and public authority; in New England, Federalists hoped that this connection could be the "mild establishment" of the traditional Congregational churches.

In the next phase key figures like Massachusetts governor Caleb Strong and the New Jersey Congressional leader Elias Boudinot led Federalists into active political combat against Jeffersonian Democratic Republicans. As he explains that combat, Den Hartog adds a religious dimension to David Hackett Fischer's still-useful account of early Federalist political mobilization.[5] As a prime example, in the presidential election of 1800 when Thomas Jefferson defeated the incumbent John Adams, Federalists called their opponents "infidels" while depicting themselves as paragons of Christian–republican virtue. Then, however, internal differences over religion, and sectional estrangement driven by slavery, undermined Federalist electoral prospects. When the Unitarianism of Harvard's Henry Ware dismayed Trinitarians like Dwight and Morse, and when commitments to slavery weakened the bonds between southern Federalists like Henry William De Saussure and C. C. Pinckney and their northern colleagues, the Federalists entered a terminal decline.

In a third phase, guided by figures like the later Elias Boudinot and two sons of John Jay (Peter Augustus and William), Federalists turned aside from overt political action to embrace reform pursued through voluntary means. Thus William Jay, who was born too late to become active in Federalist political activity, sustained many of the specific religious convictions and social goals of his father by throwing his support behind voluntary Bible societies and lending his energy to non-state organizations that opposed slavery and anti-black racism. With these means, chastened political activists found an effective, but not directly

5 David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatisim: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York, 1965).

electoral, means for achieving some of the goals they had sought as Federalist candidates for public office.

With Schlereth, Den Hartog views the religion–politics nexus as an arena where, "faced with pluralism and disestablishment, religious Federalists pioneered new ways of living within the increasingly democratic republic" (7). Again with Schlereth, he views this new way as marked by a shift of emphasis where religion considered as a truth claim made room for religion advocated because of social utility. The career of Elias Boudinot nicely illustrates this development. After an active career as an early president of the Continental Congress, President Washington's director of the Mint, and an influential Federalist Congressman, Boudinot eventually turned aside from politics to support several new philanthropic ventures, including the American Bible Society, which he served as its inaugural president in 1816. Earlier Boudinot had penned a long refutation of Paine's *The Age of Reason* entitled *The Age of Revelation*. Den Hartog's summary of this work reinforces Schlereth's main point about public religious argument: Boudinot contended that "Paine's religious ideas could undermine the belief in Christianity that served as the foundation of sound republican government. Paine's arguments would strip his readers of their beliefs, which would then ruin their morals and virtue, making them unfit to be republican citizens" (104).

The Federalists' willingness to rely on public argumentation as the means to advance their social concerns points to Den Hartog's principal conclusion: for the Federalists, adjusting to the new realities of a democratic nation meant abandoning overt political mobilization directed at formal social authority in favor of voluntary moral mobilization aimed at informal social influence. This account of what Den Hartog styles "the Federalization of American Christianity" (7) plays off Nathan Hatch's well-known "democratization of American Christianity."[6] It offers persuasive evidence that the shift of Federalist religious efforts from partisan politics to organized benevolence "gave a voluntarist, reforming, socially engaged direction to expressions of American Christians throughout the union—an effect that would last long after the Federalist party had disintegrated" (18).

If there is a weakness in Den Hartog's account, it is the neglect of other developments that also contributed to the cultural transformation of the early United States. Chief among those other developments was the rapid expansion of religious movements that, although sharing the religious Federalists' opposition to Paine-ite radicalism, also worried about the oppressive potential of the voluntary organizations that the chastened Federalists worked so hard to create.

6 Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, 1989).

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When considering how effectively Den Hartog accomplishes his main goals, this lacuna detracts minimally from his main effort. But it does point to the need for a study that examines the very serious divisions among those who agreed in denouncing Paine and in seeking to perpetuate vital Christianity in a post-Christendom United States, but who disagreed passionately about how the latter goal should be pursued.

* * *

As if they had been conducting their research deliberately in tandem, Sam Haselby's *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* supplies precisely what Den Hartog left unstudied. In addition, Haselby also fleshes out Eric Schlereth's arguments about the rules of combat that came to prevail in the new nation's public sphere.

By moving past the defeat of Paine-ite radicalism in order to probe what happened next, Haselby illuminates much that has been misunderstood concerning religion in the early nineteenth century. In so doing he also sheds light on the complex political culture of the later Jacksonian era. Haselby's account posits a basic division within evangelical Protestantism that would prove critical not only for the fate of religious movements, but also for the creation of an American religious nationalism. That division lay between populist Protestant revivalism of the frontier and a "national evangelicalism" institutionalized in missionary and other voluntary organizations. Methodists, who maintained a largely apolitical stance in their dramatic numerical rise, and Baptists, who ranged from uninterested to hostile in their response to national philanthropies, led the sectarian movements making up frontier or popular evangelicalism. A longer tradition fed into national evangelicalism—originating with early American Puritanism, maintained in the very earliest years of the republic by the "Connecticut Wits" (especially Timothy Dwight and John Trumbull), taking off with the great reform and missionary societies of the early nineteenth century, and supported in national aspirations by Unitarians and their Transcendentalist successors who had given up the religion of evangelical Christianity. In their commitments to personal conversion, the authority of the Bible, the need for personal holiness, and their antagonism to Roman Catholicism, all of the new nation's popular religious movements (excepting the Unitarians and Transcendentalists) were "evangelical." Yet they differed among themselves dramatically in what they thought about the nation—with popular Protestants caring little about the sacred destiny of the United States to which the national evangelists were deeply committed.

The radically contingent character of life in the new republic is Haselby's point of departure. Because no one knew whether the United States would make

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it as a national entity or which cultural forces would prevail in the new country, subgroups with very different agendas competed fiercely for self-direction and national authority. For at least some features of national development, this religious competition was arguably as significant as the Jeffersonian–Federalist and later Democratic–Whig competition, both of which (as these four books and others have shown) always involved a religious dimension.

Haselby highlights four factors as creating religious nationalism: political disintegration, the popularization of Protestantism, the creation of national philanthropic movements guided from the Northeast, and a felt need to incorporate the expanding frontier. Competition between the two evangelical varieties drove and was driven by these factors. With careful documentation of this divide, Haselby can explain why Indian removal took place without protest from frontier evangelicals and only mild protests from national evangelicals, why the political power of the southern planter class could be sustained as earlier opposition to slavery from both kinds of evangelicalism waned, and (above all) how Andrew Jackson successfully created a full-blown expression of religiously tinged American nationalism. In Haselby's account, Jackson succeeded in that effort by combining the antielite sentiments of frontier religion and the national messianism of the northeastern missionary voluntary societies.

His key assertion is that "the War of Independence posed rather than answered the question of American nationality" (1). To support this claim Haselby examines the goals that Thomas Jefferson and James Madison articulated as their visionary ideal for a secular republic: disestablishment, or the differentiation of the religious sphere from all else; privatization, where religion became the responsibility of ground-up personal choice rather than top-down institutional coercion; and decline, where the power of the churches gave way to other forces. When, however, this vision became reality on the first two counts, the results for the third reversed the Virginians' expectation. The separation of church and state, combined with a marked democratization of religion, sparked not religious decline, but the greatest expansion of Christianity in American history and one of the broadest such expansions for any place and any time.

Haselby also underscores what other scholars have earlier documented: Methodist expansion was vital for Christianizing the American population, even as Methodists remained largely indifferent to the era's political controversies.[7] As an illustration, Haselby references the two instances when the Methodists' peripatetic leader, Francis Asbury, is known to have met George Washington:

[7] See especially Dee Andrews, *The Mehtodists and Revolutionary America, 1760–1800* (Princeton, 2000); John H. Wigger and Nathan O. Hatch, eds., *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Nashville, 2001); and John H. Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* (New York, 2009).

the first time he wrote about it laconically in his otherwise extensive diary, the second went entirely unrecorded. Haselby also makes good in his effort to qualify Alexis de Tocqueville's claim that the democratized religion of the United States supported American nationalism. Instead, Haselby shows that large segments of American religion (almost all early Methodists, most Baptists, Disciples, "Christians," Shakers, and even some frontier Presbyterians) had no interest in, or even actively opposed, the emerging American nationalism that fascinated the French visitor in the early 1830s.

As reinforcement for the work of Jonathan Den Hartog, Haselby shows how the theocratic establishmentarianism of New England leaders like Timothy Dwight, who longed for a Puritan type of church–state union, could be transformed into the democratic and disestablishmentarian nationalism promoted by the Whig Party and the later "national evangelicals." As in Den Hartog's book, Elias Boudinot plays a significant role for Haselby. Where Den Hartog features Boudinot's efforts against Tom Paine as moving him to embrace popular persuasion and voluntary mobilization, Haselby details Boudinot's critical function in drawing together late Puritan New Englanders and the emerging bourgeois elite of the New York–Philadelphia corridor, the same coalition that included supporters of the Second Bank of the United States and the national moral reform agencies. That account, in turn, explains how the national aspirations of the conservative Protestant Boudinot could come to align with some aspirations of the post-Puritan New England Unitarians.

As a supplement to Eric Schlereth's work, Haselby details the publicity machines constructed by the national voluntary societies. If for Schlereth that machinery vanquished deism, for Haselby it effectively promoted a spirit of American nationalism. In Haselby's phrase, "the national evangelists created American mass media" (262), which in turn facilitated its exploitation by Jackson and his Democratic allies.[8] Ironically for the national evangelicals who had earlier leaned toward abolitionism, as a national print media developed in the 1810s and 1820s, national opposition to slavery contracted.

Haselby's bold positioning of intra-evangelical conflict at the center of early national history is persuasive. It would have been even more persuasive if he had expanded on Daniel Walker Howe's compelling account of the communications revolution that national evangelicals exploited so effectively in the period *c.*1815–35, or if he could have drawn on the pioneering work of Curtis Johnson, who memorably charted a parallel conflict between "formalist" and "antiformalist" evangelicals as crucial for the emergence of American

[8] Haselby, along with Schlereth, makes full use of insights from the pioneering work of David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York, 2004).

nationalism.[9] In addition, as Haselby illuminates the deep differences within religious cohorts that are routinely lumped together as "evangelical," he is not as helpful concerning conflicts over the meaning of "republican." That is, the general fear of concentrated power shared by almost all citizens in the early republic, including the apolitical Methodists, differed considerably from the ideology linking private virtue and public service that the Connecticut Wits and later national evangelicals embraced, but that the frontier revivalists did not. Finally, the book's conclusion, with Andrew Jackson appearing as the heir of the nationalists' expansive messianism and the frontier revivalists' antistatism, though suggestive, lacks strong empirical evidence. The Jackson who exiled the Cherokee and faced down South Carolina's nullification seems, on the one hand, much less concerned about Christian ethics than were the national evangelicals and, on the other, much readier to exploit national government authority than was any frontier evangelical. Yet along with Schlereth and Den Hartog, Haselby has made a signal contribution by clarifying much that had been obscure about religion and politics in the organization of early American society.

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Eran Shalev's *American Zion* effectively answers a series of important questions posed either explicitly or implicitly in the other books: how did it come about that so much received European and American colonial wisdom failed to anticipate developments in the new American nation? Why did Christian churches flourish *after* disestablishment? Why did religious competition *increase* popular adherence? How did populist evangelical Christianity spread *despite* opposition from the new nation's political elite, an elite whose religious convictions most Americans repudiated? Why did itinerant Methodists, who enjoyed unprecedented success as proselytizers, *disdain* the political struggles over which modern historians have fixated as determinative for the nation's history? Then, to phrase as a question what Alexis de Tocqueville portrayed as resulting from the American *égalité des conditions*, how could the uncensored expansion of popular print, near universal literacy, and a public fixation on the rights of white males *support* national unity? In response to these trenchant but often underinvestigated questions, Shalev points to the Hebrew Scriptures.

His book might be considered validation for a throwaway line by Perry Miller from 1955: "The Old Testament is truly so omnipresent in the American culture of 1800 or 1820 that historians have as much difficulty taking cognizance of it

9 Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York, 2007); Curtis D. Johnson, *Redeeming America: Evangelicals and the Road to Civil War* (Chicago, 1993).

as of the air people breathed."[10] *America's Zion* provides documentation for a strong, ongoing, and relatively widespread identification of the United States with Old Testament Israel—even as the "second Israel" or the "new Israel"—from the Revolution through the era of the Civil War. This identification arose from the Calvinist sense of mission that infused early New England, but then during the American War of Independence broadened out to the whole of the new United States. The intense apocalypticism of the French and Indian War and what Shalev calls the "extreme biblicism" (9) of the literate colonial population lay behind this identification, which in the decades after 1780 registered both national self-confidence and national anxiety. A particularly intriguing feature of Shalev's argument is the claim that national identification with the Old Testament (hereafter OT) intensified until about 1830, only to decline with a steadily rising American preference for the New Testament (hereafter NT) and then a near disappearance of national OT identification after the Civil War.

This historical reconstruction begins with "biblical republicanism" in the era of the American Revolution when leading American spokesmen used OT narratives to sanctify Revolutionary ideology. Shalev's evidence includes the proposal by Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, themselves advocates of something like the deism described by Schlereth, which would have made a depiction of the Israelite escape across the Dead Sea the national seal of the new US. It focuses as well on the panoply of OT references that were invoked to support the patriot cause: Haman from the story of Esther was the conniving Parliament, Mordecai from the same story represented heroic American patriots, the Curse of Meroz from Judges 5 spelled out what Tories deserved, Gideon was George Washington, the daughter of Jephthah represented noble republican womanhood, the Maccabees stood for courageous patriots, and so on.[11]

In Shalev's picture, the new nation's inherited "Old Testamentism" led to several nationally influential manifestations during the first decades of the nineteenth century. First was widespread reference to the United States as a "Hebrew republic." With voices from New England leading the way, several authors detailed the way that the United States replicated OT Israel's "federalism" (the states as the Twelve Tribes), its republicanism (Moses as a protector of the people's freedom), and its constitutionalism (with the laws of Moses anticipating the Constitution).

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[10] Perry Miller, "The Garden of Eden and the Deacon's Meadow," *American Heritage*, 7/1 (1955), 54–61, 102, at 54.

[11] Extensive documentation for such identifications is also provided by Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*; and Daniel L. Dreisbach, "The Bible and the Political Culture of the American Revolution," in Daniel L. Dreisbach and Mark David Hall, eds., *Faith and the Founders of the American Republic* (New York, 2014), 144–73.

Shalev also documents the popularity of political pamphlets published as biblical pastiche—that is, with prose broken into chapters and verses, American names elided with ancient Hebrew nomenclature, and archaic language imitating the King James Bible. Not only did such accounts appear in every American region, but these many "pseudo-biblical" efforts also imparted a sacred aura to strongly exceptionalist narratives of American history. In his phrases, the widespread use of biblical pastiche "made America relevant to the Bible" and also succeeded in "bibliciz[ing] America" (101). To underscore a main argument of the book, it is also clear that these pseudo-biblical efforts always imitated OT narratives and style, never NT.

Shalev then turns to the Book of Mormon, which he describes as riding the crest of these pseudo-biblical publications. An unusually well-balanced treatment documents the many ways that Joseph Smith's effort followed in paths well established by pseudo-biblical publications, while also pointing out key differences in what Smith published—especially the Book of Mormon's providentialist account of God's actions in shaping terrestrial events, which was entirely missing from earlier pseudo-biblical publications.

Shalev pauses to describe antebellum Americans who moved beyond metaphor and typology to portray themselves as actual Israelites. Their number included Mordecai Noah (a Jew who wanted to establish a refuge for Jews of the world in the Niagara River, but under the protection of the United States), the many figures (including Elias Boudinot) who thought that Native Americans might be the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, followers of the Kingdom of Mathias who (as among sixteenth-century Anabaptists) sought to revive Hebrew patriarchy, and finally those who joined the British Israelite sects.

By showing that from about 1830 both antislavery and proslavery forces exerted greatest energy in supporting their positions from the NT, *American Zion* adds to the rich scholarship on the Bible and slavery in the antebellum period. Shalev is not the first to make this general case, but he makes it with more attention to broader contexts than anyone has done before.[12] While acknowledging that proslavery voices continued to cite OT legislation that allowed Israel to enslave foreign captives, Shalev shows that advocates for slavery also made full use of the NT Book of Philemon, where the Apostle Paul sent a runaway slave back to his owner, and the absence of anything even remotely abolitionist in the recorded words of Jesus or the Apostle Paul. At the same time, he details the lengths to which abolitionists went in their appeal to the character of Jesus and the "spirit" of the NT as implicit denunciations of the institution. Shalev's treatment accords

[12] Shalev makes especially good use of Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York, 2003); and Richard Wightman Fox, *Jesus in America: A History* (San Francisco, 2004).

with the pathbreaking scholarship of Molly Oshatz, who has spelled out that as abolitionists historicized OT narratives, they adopted liberal views of Scripture even as they undercut what had previously been the ahistorical identification of the US and Israel.[13] For evidence of a national turning to the NT, Shalev cites the two prominent Christ figures in the wildly popular *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the boom in American fiction, like Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur*, based on NT narratives. To add complexity to Shalev's picture, African Americans found the Exodus motif enduringly encouraging as a trope for their liberation from slavery, but this identification also undercut the identification of America and ancient Israel by portraying the slave-sanctioning US as the Egypt from which "God's people" needed to escape.

Shalev's findings resonate with Jonathan Den Hartog's depiction of Elias Boudinot when Shalev describes Boudinot's book identifying Native Americans as the lost tribes of Israel (*A Star in the West*). The authors agree that such works reflected national and religious anxiety at the end of the War of 1812, but Shalev would have benefited from Den Hartog's observation that by the time that book was published in 1816, Federalists had mostly given up their aspiration for direct control of the nation in favor of a turn to voluntarism. Other adjustments that might have strengthened *American Zion* include the insight of Sam Haselby that strongly nationalist uses of the OT came much more from New England and "evangelical nationalists," and much less from "frontier evangelicals" who often ignored the OT or treated it typologically as prefiguring Christian religious realities.

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Other historians must, of course, scrutinize with care the individual claims of these four books as well as the general picture that I have discerned in their collective findings. Did American nationalism in fact arise mostly *after* the Revolution? As a result of the political decline of the Federalists? From contentions among evangelical Protestants? And heavily dependent on a near universal deference to the Hebrew Scriptures?

In a larger framework, the four books push back gently against the tendency of much recent history to foreground class and gender as key to all other dimensions of American history. Slavery does figure substantially for Schlereth, Haselby, and Shalev, but more as a background or consequence of the intellectual developments

[13] Molly Oshatz, "The Problem of Moral Progress: The Slavery Debates and the Development of Liberal Protestantism in the United States," *Modern Intellectual History*, 5/2 (2008), 225–50; Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin: The Fight against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism* (New York, 2012).

they narrate. Women certainly did provide a majority of those who embraced evangelical religion and who offered essential support to the public spokesmen who repudiated Paine and defended a traditional deference to Scripture. It would be wrong to see any of the four authors as denying these basic realities. Yet their accounts convincingly depict matters with manifest intellectual heft as foundational for the nation's early history. If the authors do sideline the Founding Fathers, presidents, senators, and economic kingpins as the crucial purveyors of those ideas, they demonstrate that allegiance to ideas and contests over ideas nevertheless deserve full attention in the broader national story.

When read as a unit, the books make several general points about the emergence of national habits of mind. First is the need to expand the roster of key players on the nation stage. Tom Paine and Elihu Palmer as militant deists; Francis Asbury as the Methodists' organizational genius; William and Peter Augustus Jay as guiding former Federalists toward voluntarism; Elias Boudinot as one of Paine's most committed opponents, *and* one of the leaders in identifying Native Americans as the Lost Tribes of Israel, *and* first president of the American Bible Society; Joseph Smith as the culmination of topographical, as well as an ideological and religious, uses of Scripture—such individuals loom in these books with the national influence usually accorded Jefferson, Madison, Clay, and their ilk.

By challenging standard interpretations of Andrew Jackson, Sam Haselby does not so much rescue an overlooked figure as emphasize the importance of religious conflict in creating "Jacksonian democracy." In his depiction, Jackson, though hardly evangelical himself, adeptly exploited the preoccupations of frontier evangelicals, as well as political and economic resentments, in promoting a sacred conception of the nation and facilitating his own expansion of central governmental authority. Where Haselby appeals for a different angle on a recognized figure, the others appeal for fresh appreciation of overlooked actors.

A second common theme is the culture-wide importance of the Bible. The ubiquity of Scripture in early America is hardly news, since many scholars have securely documented various aspects of that fact. As only one instance, Margaret Hills' splendid catalogue of American Bible editions, published in 1962, documented the rapid expansion of Bible publication in the early republic: eighteen separate editions in the decade of the 1780s, 101 in the 1800s, three hundred in the 1820s.[14] Yet the four narratives considered here mount an implicit appeal for deeper understanding of what scriptural ubiquity meant for American civilization: Shalev by showing how powerfully the Old Testament, or Hebrew Scriptures, worked to supply images of national self-identity; Schlereth

[14] Margaret T. Hills, *The English Bible in America: A Bibliography of Editions of the Bible and the New Teatment Published in America, 1777–1957* (New York, 1962), 1–105.

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by describing the Bible's status as the contested crux in the turbulent reaction to Paine; Haselby by placing Scripture's interpretation as the contested crux in the struggle between frontier evangelicals and national evangelicals; and den Hartog by portraying the Bible as the crucial object around which post-Federalists rallied in their move toward voluntary social mobilization.

These books, third, underscore the almost complete vacuity of the notion of an undifferentiated Second Great Awakening. To be sure, American society was much more thoroughly churched and more decidedly evangelical in 1840 than it had been in 1790. Yet that development resulted from a complex of factors that are badly obscured in the evocation of a one-size-fits-all religious revival. Those factors included Jeffersonian–Federalist political conflict, the great public attention won by feisty deists and promoters of "free inquiry," the extraordinary (but also apolitical) appeal of the Methodists, and the pervasive struggle between national evangelicals who defined the health of the republic in terms of national mobilization to promote virtue and frontier evangelicals who defined it as liberation from organized coercion of any sort.

Insights from these four books concerning crucial actors, the Bible, and the shape of early national society certainly require further investigation. Yet all who value a clearer view of American history in its formative decades—and especially of the religious convictions that drove much of that history—owe a considerable debt to these authors and their books.