Republican Theology: The Civil Religion of American Evangelicals. By Benjamin T. Lynerd. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 264p. $105.00.
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— Peter Augustine Lawler, *Berry College*

Republican theology is the way "many American Christians" have "bundled the concepts of individual liberty and religious morality into a unified ideology." The point of this book is to explain how American Christians have gone about this bundling, and to criticize, time and again, their inevitably futile attempts, from the eighteenth century until today, to turn incoherence into unity. This "observable tradition within American political thought" that attempts to fuse "moral and libertarian imperatives" remains "precarious" because it is "contradictory" (pp. 14–15). The tradition is of attempts to fuse what Tocqueville presents as our two foundings: the intrusively biblical moral and political egalitarianism of the Puritans and the basically secular rights-based individualism of Thomas Jefferson and most of the other leading men of the revolutionary generation.

Tocqueville himself wrote to praise the American capacity to harmonize the spirit of religion with the spirit of liberty, but even he suggested that the harmonization was more like a prudent mixture or compromise. Benjamin T. Lynerd's final explanation of republican theology is both "a bundle of contradictions waiting to unravel at any moment" and a tradition that has endured in some form or another for centuries precisely because it has incorporated "three broadly attractive principles—the protection of individual rights, the aspirations toward personal virtue, and the prospect of a divinely blessed nation" (pp. 206–7). America at its best, someone might say, has always included the holding together of diverse human goods in tension.

The true heir of the Puritans in the twentieth century, as Lynerd suggests, was William Jennings Bryan, who "was as antimodernist in his religion as he was progressive in his economics" (p. 156). But, for the most part, the proponents of the Social Gospel were theologically modern or liberal, displaying a kind of civil theology that was the opposite form of incoherence to that of the evangelicals. They, in some ways, held onto the Puritans' political moralism without the real belief in personal salvation of the Puritans' themselves. Most evangelicals across the decades of the last century, however, wanted to reconcile affirmation of free-market individualism—or little to no Christian judgment when it comes to our economic life—with some puritanical criminalization of sin when it comes to personal morality, when it comes to marriage, sexuality, abortion, the consumption of alcohol, and so forth.

I am somewhat less judgmental than Lynerd when it comes to the evangelical political impulse, because I think it corresponds better than he does with evangelical theology. Most Protestantism, after all, is a form of Augustinianism. And the theocentric political egalitarianism that turned the Puritans into pilgrims looking for a place to make their idea a political reality in a particular part of the world is a long distance from the theology of the Baptists, who, of course, readily allied with Jefferson and Madison on the freedom of conscience of the high wall of separation of religion and politics. A persistent (though far from constant, as Lynerd ably shows) evangelical strategy is the deployment of relatively libertarian means for their Christian purposes. For Locke, "rights are absolutes within the law of nature," but "republican theologians see them as vital means to a greater end" (p. 41). Some might say that the republican theologians see better than the purely liberal republicans what the limits of government are for, and so their view of each of us is more integral than that of the Lockean satisfied with merely negative freedom.

The result is that churches in America can flourish free from political control, usually keeping in mind that, strictly speaking, civil theology and even republican theology are, from a Christian view, oxymorons. The truth about who we are as free and relational beings, Augustine says, is found in the City of God, in the light of which the political city is to be viewed mostly instrumentally by aliens or pilgrims. Republican theology, to be sure, is rarely free from the thought that America is an exceptional nation blessed by God, but, it seems to me, rarely at the expense of denying the sovereignty of the God of the Bible over all nations.

That is not to say that republican theology is rife with incoherencies, incoherencies rooted perhaps more in evangelical theology itself than in some kind of Americanism. Theological individualism, as Lynerd shows in places, undermines the authority that forms a church into an enduring community of thought and action. And it is tough to contain the logic of Lockean individualism to moral and political life, to keep, as they say, Locke in the Locke box. Locke, after all, is himself a kind of Augustinian Christian in his individualistic privileging of the free person over civic and natural (Darwinian) imperatives. This truthful insight is the foundation of our evangelicals' resolution is their opposition to progressivist ideologies that reduce the person to a part of some historical process. It is also, however, the source of what they rightly regard as the anti-Christian dogma: that the mystery of personal autonomy trumps all relational duty. It is on that highly personal or individualistic ground that our evangelicals have had so much difficulty justifying legalized moral coercion. So Lynerd is on solid ground—on Augustinian ground—when he concludes his narrative of the New Right's evangelical overreach with a takeaway all about "the fallacy of believing that politics holds solutions to deep moral problems" (p. 198).

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That conclusion is too complacent. The danger now is that our churches will not have the safe space required to teach authoritatively their countercultural critique of the destructive excesses of our creeping libertarianism. What follows, for example, the Supreme Court's declaration of a constitutional right to same-sex marriage is the demand that the internal life of our churches and our believers must conform to the dominant view of rights-based justice. It might be good for Christians to be somewhat alienated from fashionable currents, both libertarian and progressive, in American political life, but surely not so alienated that they are viewed as operating outside the law and rational, respectable conversation. And it really has been the case, as Tocqueville observed, that most of our personal morality has always come from religion. Lockean or Rawlsian liberalism has little to nothing to say about the line between good and evil that, as Alexandr Solzhenitsyn reminded us, runs through every person's heart, or about how to subordinate the intricate trial to free will that is the seemingly unlimited progress of technology to human-worthy purposes that surely cannot be reduced to liberal justice and personal autonomy.

Avoiding that complacency is one reason why Lynerd's presentation of the crisis of our time for republican theology is, in part, with the intention of criticizing the superficiality of both evangelical theology and evangelical political thought with Christian political reflection that is more truthful and enduring. The concluding chapter on the era of the dominance and then the possible failure of evangelical free-market theology is followed by an epilogue. There, Lynerd observes that "*None* of the major Christian philosophers of the last half century has emerged as an apologist for [evangelical] republican theology," condemning, for the most part, its "selective libertarianism" (p. 200). Thinkers such as Alastair MacIntrye, Stanley Hauerwas, and Oliver O'Donovan deny the truth of the Lockean doctrines concerning natural rights and limited government; they are integrative thinkers believing that political life should be infused with "love as the central imperative of justice" (p. 201), And even Nicholas Wolsterdorf, who finds a foundation for natural, inherent rights in the Christian understanding of justice, rejects republican theology's limitation of government to the protection of individual rights, with an uncharitable indifference to human needs. But surely it is more of a problem than Lynerd suggests that each of his "Christian philosophers" holds to theologian premises incompatible with the extreme Augustinianism characteristic of most evangelical theology. Evangelical thinkers who become too open to, say, Catholic thought typically abandon the evangelical theological tradition because it is not traditional enough. Not only that, surely it is not a small matter that, say, MacIntrye's political thought is also less than coherent or even judicious in its angry anti-Americanism and its curiously selective Marxism.

Still, Lynerd does not really think that the "apparent wedge between the academy and the pulpit" will be resolved on the side of the Christian philosophers (p. 16). He doubts that mainstream evangelical republican theology will move to the left in a way that, in his view, makes it less American—meaning Lockean—and more authentically, or traditionally, Christian. Americans persist in wanting to believe that each of us is a free and relational being who is a creature, a citizen, and capable of managing his and her own affairs. There are good reasons why evangelical theology is at home in America, and why the supporters of Ted Cruz, for example, are evangelical, classically liberal patriots.

So Lynerd leave us with the thought that incoherence and superficiality do not have all that much weight as practical criticisms. It might well be the case, once again, that exactly when we think the moment of republican theology " has passed, along come the political and cultural conditions for a revival" (p. 206). His deepest view seems to be that liberal reason and biblical revelation are incompatible in theory, and that is a perennial problem for American practice. But so much of the evidence he presents suggests that American liberal reason is more dependent on Augustinian premises than liberals often think, and that is why we Americans both need and can expect revivals.

Civics Beyond Critics: Character Education in a Liberal Democracy. By Ian MacMullen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 275p. $49.95.
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In his important new book, Ian MacMullen offers a philosophically sophisticated political theory of civic education. The question of how to cultivate good citizens of a democracy who are not mere subjects has long been a concern of students of politics. According to many political philosophers, from Aristotle to Tocqueville, and according to many political scientists, from Gabriel Almond to Robert Putnam, we learn how to become good citizens mainly by participating in local social and political institutions, ranging from bowling leagues to the PTA, from serving in the army to serving on juries. In this view, being a good citizen is not primarily something we are taught, but is something we learn in the course of belonging to and leading some of the myriad small platoons that make up a complex pluralistic democracy.

Ian MacMullen, following many other contemporary political theorists, such as Amy Gutmann, Dennis Thompson, William Galston, and Stephen Macedo, argues that these informal modes of political socialization are not adequate and that, in addition, children need deliberate instruction in civic virtue if they are to become good citizens. Most advocates of deliberate civic

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