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Book Reviews and Notes

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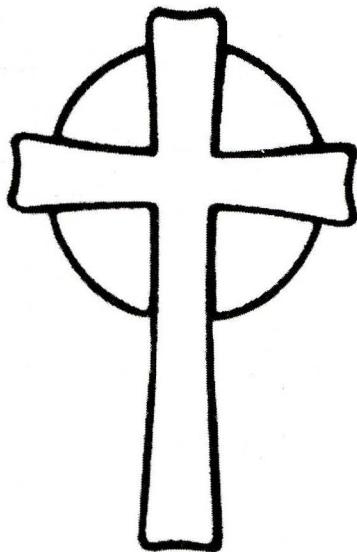
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BOOK REVIEWS

Myths America Lives By, by RICHARD T. HUGHES. Foreword by ROBERT N. BELLAH. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003. 224 pp. \$29.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.¹

How should Americans understand themselves? In *Myths America Lives By* Richard Hughes has identified five convictions that have historically shaped our national self-image. First is the myth of the Chosen Nation, which maintains our providential election, Israel-like, among all other peoples; and second is the myth of Nature's Nation, which credits our existence to the truths that are self-evidently decreed by "nature." Third is the myth of the Christian Nation, which, in spite of the obvious realities of pluralism, lays claim to some degree of civic Christianity. Fourth is the myth of the Millennial Nation, in which we are framed as the world's best hope for peace and prosperity; and fifth is the myth of the Innocent Nation, which refuses to acknowledge any significant measure of collective national guilt. With each summation he explains how the myths have been turned to the detriment of minority communities.

I fear that many people will misconstrue the flavor of this book. First, for many, the word "myth" will surely connote something silly, something untrue, or something to discard. Hughes is very clear on this point, however. In his usage, a national myth, true or untrue, is "a story that conveys commonly shared convictions on the purposes and the meaning of the nation" (2). Such constructs, he says, are essential to the life of a people and should not be cynically undermined. He takes exception to the myth of the Innocent Nation (it is finally grounded in "self-delusion," [8]), but he finds no damning fault with the others unless they are "absolutized" into triumphalism and self-promotion. This thoughtful balance is the genius of the book and is particularly helpful for Americans who struggle to treat the myths with a critical eye that is respectful nonetheless.

I also fear that some might misconstrue the intent of the book. That Hughes emphatically indicts the racism and economic oppression that has continually surfaced in our national narrative might seem to belie his introductory assertions about the value of national myths. It is not the mythic tradition, however, that he asks us to reconsider; rather, he wants us to understand the ways in which our self-image has been corrupted by absolutist errors. For instance, at its best the

¹ The following three reviews by Keith Huey, Arthur Sutherland and Lee Camp with Richard Hughes's response were presented at the annual Scholars' Conference at Rochester College, July 17, 2004.

myth of Nature's Nation affirms the equality of all people, but it is absolutized when it assumes that we are the only civilization sufficiently wise to embrace such self-evident truths. From here, Hughes illustrates the indignities that have been visited upon Native and African Americans, all in the name of natural law. Similarly, the myth of the Millennial Nation has been used to justify the aggressive imperialism of manifest destiny, and all of the myths have been pressed into the service of unlimited capitalistic acquisition.

This discussion makes for melancholy results, but these are tempered by Hughes's steady optimism about the transforming power of well-founded national stories. It is an optimism that he draws, ironically, from those who have suffered most from our absolutist extremes. When Martin Luther King Jr. exclaimed that he had "a dream," he was, in fact, echoing strains of our best mythic material.

Ultimately, Hughes is right about the existence of these myths and about the way they have been absolutized since the earliest days of our national experience. Nonetheless, he has tacitly posed an oft-debated issue for historical methodology: what *universal* conclusions can we realistically draw from the speeches of *particular* individuals such as Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Carnegie and Albert Beveridge? This method of plumbing the past must assume a considerable degree of homogeneity between the culture and its most quotable figures—a myth that historians, as much as possible, should avoid. Our country has always been diverse and conflicted, and there is something audacious about naming any culture's "commonly shared convictions" (2).

Once again, Hughes is right. Instead of using representative citations from particular speakers and writers, however, he could justify his audacity by the widespread, not-so-particular mischief that has come from mythic corruption. Hughes demonstrates the injury of noble notions gone astray with examples that have been perpetuated on a general scale in spite of diverse opinions and sectional differences. Jefferson, Carnegie, and Beveridge were not singular repositories of self-serving metanarrative, and the error has never been limited to the North or the South, the church or the world, the liberal or the conservative. The Cherokee Trail of Tears, for instance, could have been realized only in the midst of a widespread cultural consensus, and the late 1800s could not have been "gilded" without pervasive national complicity. Angela Davis (who is cited by Hughes [178-79]) spoke insightfully about the Birmingham murders of 1963 when she described the event as something that had "burst out of the daily, sometimes even dull, routine of racist oppression."²

I have only one more methodological issue: Hughes provides astute descriptions of the origins behind each myth, but his coverage is dominated by domestic scenes from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For historians, such material is almost self-evidently relevant, but we must ask how it will be regarded by

² Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1974; repr.; New York: International, 1988), 130-31.

people who live in an ostensibly myth-free zone. Surely we could say much more about the militarism, economic colonialism, and quasi-Christian patriotism of the past one hundred years (not to mention the present). Unless we indict the present as well as the past, we will insinuate a gulf that stands fixed between us and those very errors that Hughes would have us engage.

For instance, he gives us graphic and arresting accounts of “Indian removal” (114–22) and of lynchings (146–47), accounts so appalling that we might plausibly reassure ourselves (or worse, congratulate ourselves) on the grounds that times have changed and Americans are no longer inclined toward such atrocities. Moreover, our search for current examples will founder if it resorts to the margins of American ideology (the post 9/11 commentary of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson [87–88] comes to mind). In all such cases, the majority will surely escape any significant measure of guilt by association. The remarkable clip Hughes recalls from the movie *Rocky IV* (56–57) might seem to reflect a cultural consensus, but it also has significant limitations. I have employed this visual aid in my classroom (and will continue to do so), but my students, quite unconvinced, have dismissed its quaint naïveté. I suspect they would say they have dodged all five of the mythic bullets described in this book. As Hughes observes:

... each of these myths functions at an unconscious level for most Americans. This means that these myths are essentially invisible and must remain invisible unless we name them, bring them to consciousness, and explore the way they have functioned—and continue to function—in American culture (8).

This is quite a challenge. To bring the myths “to consciousness” and to explore the way they “continue to function,” we must persuasively link the past with the present, and we must deal with a world that subjects suspected metanarratives to rigorous interrogation and frequent humiliation.

At first blush, it might seem that I am asking for a longer book; once again, however, I believe that Hughes has already furnished a considerable portion of the requisite insights with his discussion of the Myth of the Innocent Nation. He has carried it forward through both World Wars and into the 1960s. He observes it in recent presidential speeches. He sees it in the rubble of the Alfred P. Murrah Building, and in the War on Terror. If we understand this singular myth as Hughes intends, it might well carry his entire mythic package forward, from the nineteenth-century into the present. For him, the myth of the Innocent Nation is not a separate idea at all: it is the delusion that occurs when we absolutize our identity as a Christian Nation, when we claim the merits of a Chosen Nation, when we assume the uniquely pristine purity of Nature’s Nation, or when we fail to examine our fitness to be the Millennial Nation (154–55). Other myths might have supplemented our pretensions to national innocence; nonetheless, wherever the Myth of the Innocent Nation exists, it testifies to the present-day currency of older ideas.

I cannot think of a more instructive application than the scandal at Abu Ghraib prison. I am not particularly interested, here, in the actual abuse (which I consider to be endemic to military cultures), but in the way that Americans have

coped with its damaging implications. Government officials, pundits, and preachers alike have relentlessly (and absurdly) reiterated the *limited* guilt of "a few bad apples"; those apples, moreover, have been explicitly preferred to the recent series of kidnapers who behead their victims. I am fascinated by the perspective that Hughes provides for this event. What deeply held ideals do we seek to protect as we rationalize our innocence? What will we lose if our protestations fail?

It does not take a hopeless romantic or a right-wing extremist to notice, as Bellah asserts in his foreword, that our nation's power is unparalleled and unprecedented. For good or for ill, deserved or not, we are, indeed, a "city set on a hill," and we must begin to hear the voices that claim to be chafing beneath our influence, from the Middle East to Central America to Western Europe to our own urban centers. It is also a good time to mine our national heritage for a vision that can lead us wisely and continually to subject that vision to the light that shines from the life and meaning of Jesus Christ. As Bellah says, "It is precisely at this moment that Richard Hughes's book is so appropriate" (xi-xii).

Rochester College

KEITH HUEY

I was asked by David Fleeer to write a response to *Myths Americans Live By* and take as my cue the jacket blurb by James Cone: "Because the perspectives of minorities are prominent throughout, many whites may find it challenging and difficult to read. If, however they press forward with empathy, they will gain a larger perspective on America that will enable them to work together with African Americans and others in making this land an oasis of freedom and justice for all its citizens." Cone is the Briggs Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary and for the last thirty years the leading voice among African American theologians. It also worth noting that a commendation is given by Molefi Kete Asante, professor and chair of African American Studies at Temple University. Because Asante, who has connections to Churches of Christ, is a historian, not a theologian, and is a critic of European cultural dominance, he is an even less hesitant critic of Christianity in its American form than Cone.

I suspect that both Cone and Asante welcome this text for many of the same reasons that I do. It is clear and straightforward and gives a reading of America's past that causes the reader to assess critically the inequities of the present. In my case, I began writing this review the week of President Reagan's funeral. There is no small degree of irony in this. The funeral service featured Jonathan Winthrop's famous sermon given as the Puritans' ship the *Arabella*, sailed from England across the Atlantic in 1630. Winthrop's sermon, titled "A Model of Christian Charity," set forth his understanding of the divine purposes of God for the colony shortly to be established in Massachusetts. By declaring that "We shall be a city set on a hill," he hoped for a Christian community governed by God and in harmony with divine law. It was to be the beginning of a "golden age" that would culminate in all the nations of the earth emulating its sanction and purpose. Hughes points out that this vision is at the very heart of America's soul. It appears and reappears in ways in which we are often not conscious. That

President Reagan looked to Winthrop as a way of legitimating his own vision of America is beyond dispute. As former Senator Danforth, who presided over the service, said, "The Winthrop message became the Reagan message. It rang of optimism, and we longed to hear it."

What has been missing from the discussion of Reagan's message and legacy is any recognition of the fact that Winthrop's optimistic vision for America was limited to white men of property. The foundation of the city on a hill was inherently racist, sexist, and classist. For example, in 1641 the Massachusetts Body of Liberties, under the guidance of Winthrop and urged on by rum merchants, shipbuilders, and slave traders, became the first colonial court officially sanctioning the institution of slavery. In 1670, the Massachusetts General Court ruled that the race of the mother determined the race of her child. Since African American slaves had no legal status, this ruling had the effect of freeing white fathers of responsibility for the children they produced with black women and opened the way to the systematic exploitation and rape of African American women by white men. By 1700 the colony had the largest slave population of any of the colonies. A cogent summary of these sad events laid upon African Americans is encapsulated by a later Boston resident, Malcolm X, who said "We didn't land on Plymouth Rock my brothers and sisters—Plymouth Rock landed on us!" These comments on Reagan's legacy are important because Hughes's text examines both the "Christian" foundations of America's fundamental myths and African American dissent from the optimistic vision and restricted participation informing those myths.

The myth of America's election, eloquently summarized in Winthrop's sermon using the image from Matthew 5 of a city on a hill, is the first of five myths that Hughes says form the American Creed. According to Hughes these myths "function at an unconscious level for most Americans. Thus these myths are essentially invisible and must remain invisible unless we name them, bring them to consciousness, and explore the way they have functioned—and continue to function—in American culture. Unless we undertake this task, they may well be the means by which we continue to undermine the American Creed, especially for the poor, the marginalized, and the dispossessed" (8).

Hughes's book ensures that the voices of those excluded from the original vision are brought into the conversation about the functioning of those myths today. The occasion of the Reagan funeral and the national confidence and moral superiority evoked by the repeated recitation of the vision of the city on a hill will hopefully be a catalyst for such an exploration. My point in bringing up Reagan's funeral is not because I want to speak ill of the dead but because, like Hughes and Cone, I want our national discussion to address the well-being of the living. I wish to focus not on an individual but on the diverse inhabitants of the city on a hill. This can be done only if we follow Hughes's admonition "to take seriously the voices of those who have been enslaved, segregated, and disenfranchised" (9). The streets of Boston, the epicenter of Winthrop's "city on a hill," are notoriously crooked, as has been the path to justice in America.

As an interpreter of American history, Hughes is a far cry from Morison and Commager, who in their 1950 edition of *The Growth of the American Republic* began their discussion of Africans in America with "as for Sambo" and who understood the slaves to be "incurably optimistic, attached to the country, and devoted to white folks." Morison and Commager made African Americans pillars of the American Creed by silencing their rage and ignoring their experience. There is a certain weariness today that African Americans feel with having to explain their dissent from the founding myths of this country. For many white Americans this dissent is puzzling and frustrating. In this light Cone invites white readers to read Hughes's text with empathy. *Myths America Lives By* is an attempt to have African American voices heard in the examination of America's myths, even if in this case it is done by proxy.

I am reminded of a conversation I had with William Sloane Coffin, former chaplain at Yale and preacher for Riverside Church in New York. When I asked him why he so often won debates with his opponents, Coffin smiled and replied, "They didn't know their American history." Those who come to know Hughes's book will not only be better informed about American history but will be on the way to building a better country.

Loyola College in Maryland

ARTHUR SUTHERLAND

Richard Hughes has long insisted that we be self-consciously aware that "doing history" never equals a bald recounting of value-free facts. Instead, "history" always assumes a set of convictions and practices long before the storyteller chooses which characters will be heroes and which villains, which events will be tragic and which triumphant. With *Myths America Lives By*, Hughes has blessed us yet again, looking beyond the borders of our fellowship at the larger American context in which we find ourselves. He shatters the naïveté with which many Christians equate the cause of Christ with the cause of the United States. For American history professors, *Myths* ought to be on a required reading list. Church elderships should read the book, too, certainly prior to planning the next church commemoration of Memorial Day, Veteran's Day, or the Fourth of July.

When writing most explicitly as a Christian, Hughes forthrightly states the "objective that defines this text: to take seriously the voices of those who have been enslaved, segregated, and disenfranchised." Here *Myths* is simply a jewel. There is good biblical warrant for a historiography of the down-trodden rather than a hermeneutic of the victors. Like Paul and like Revelation 13, Hughes knows that the principalities and powers often delude, enslave, and oppress, so he tells stories about our American forebears we would rather not hear, requiring us to face the genocide, massacres, and enslavement, all done in the name of America's myths: that of the Chosen People, Nature's Nation, the Christian Nation, the Millennial Nation, and the Innocent Nation.

Judged psychologically, *Myths* may be likened to a series of intense psychotherapeutic sessions: the painful digging up of the past, scrounging around in the closets of our sub-conscious, to see what unknowns lurk there, controlling us. Consequently, there come "aha!" moments, in which self-discovery makes

sudden sense of hitherto exasperating matters. How could it be, for example, that just this summer George W. Bush eulogized Ronald Reagan as one who believed "America is not just a place, but the hope of the world"? How are Christians silent in response to this? How can they not, as a colleague put it, "scream bloody murder"? Thanks to Hughes's story-telling, an answer is forthcoming. This is but one of the five long-held myths discussed at length in the book, the myth of America as the millennial nation. Such idolatry has been practiced by numerous prominent Americans. Reagan's America was the "shining city on the hill." For Senator Albert Beveridge, of Spanish-American War era-fame, God had "marked the American people as His chosen nation to finally lead in the redemption of the world." For Lyman Beecher, the United States would lead the world until "the world's hope is secure." And according to the seal of the United States, America is *novus ordo seclorum*, "a new order of the ages," language akin to NT descriptions of the kingdom of God. Similarly, the recent reaction to France's refusal to participate in a pre-emptive war against Iraq might seem a bit reactionary judged in isolation (no more "French Fries," but "Freedom Fries"), but makes great sense when one learns that such posturing is but an old habit, evidenced by the propaganda of the United States' Committee on Public Information during World War I, when *sauerkraut* was re-named "liberty cabbage." *Myths* is filled with such fascinating story-telling, elucidating our national psyche in sometimes frightening ways.

I do have some questions about the "thesis" of *Myths*, which I understand thus: the United States finds its primal meaning in the "American Creed," a creed most succinctly stated in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." The five myths then serve as stories that "convey commonly shared convictions on the purposes and the meaning of the nation." As such, they are helpful and necessary. But these myths taken in their "absolutized" form become dangerous. Thus Hughes summarizes: "it is precisely when powerful people absolutize their virtues that the interests of the poor and marginalized are most at risk. That is the fundamental premise of this book."

In spite of the fact that Hughes notes that the American Creed "has little to do with Christian orthodoxy," he does not want us to scuttle that creed or its supporting myths. "Most of the myths explored in this book hold great potential for good . . . [and can] sustain the promise of the American Creed." Instead, "revolution" might occur if we embrace the "highest and noblest form" of those myths. This will require, he reminds us, "extraordinary humility," and a willingness to "see the world through someone else's eyes, perhaps even through the eyes of their enemies." In this way, he hopes, the national myths might sustain the American Creed.

However, many of the ironies that Hughes recounts cause us to question this hopefulness. First, creeds should be judged by their accompanying practices. *Myths* shows us some very ugly practices. In questioning Hughes's hopefulness, we need not fall prey to what he calls a "fundamentalism of the left," for we can

rightly celebrate aspects of American history—for example, the evolution of the legal tradition of “rights”—so that the “Men” of Jefferson’s Declaration (i.e., free, white, landowners) slowly became men and women, without regard to color of skin or economic standing. Christians can celebrate this development because, by analogy, it is a practice that respects what Christian baptism has proclaimed for two millennia. A particular myth might indeed spawn certain “values” or even practices that Christians celebrate, but they cannot be celebrated in and of themselves, without falling prey to some sort of ahistorical moral universalism.

Second, and related, Hughes speaks of the “virtues” inherent in (some of) these myths. But a virtue is never a virtue without a *telos*—without an accompanying end toward which that virtue is striving. There are no virtues “as such,” but only virtues for given communities and contexts. For this reason a tradition of “rights” has a difficult time holding rational discourse, for there is no *telos* for which those “rights” should be ordered. This is, indeed, the very point of the American Creed: it is the individual who is endowed with timeless, universal “rights,” to pursue an individualistic agenda of “happiness.”

In spite of this rhetoric, however, a community cannot exist without *some* sort of shared commitments. This is precisely the necessity of the American myths. It is also the reason some political philosophers suggest western liberalism is “parasitic” off more substantive moral traditions. Thus Eisenhower’s judgment that “our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith—and I don’t care what it is.” A parasite needs some host, and parasites cannot be choosy.

However, Eisenhower was wrong. There are certain “faiths” that would be very threatening to “our government,” for example, a faith in resurrection, which trusts God above the sword and might and wealth. But judged by the fruit of which *Myths* is the inspector, the American Creed has depended upon precisely the sword and might and wealth to preserve itself. A chastened American spirit will not provoke revolution. What is needed is conversion, a true revolution, marked by the likes of baptism, repentance, and discipleship. Our nation-state has not shown itself a fit vessel for such truly revolutionary practices, and it is not clear that it ever can be. But *Myths* also reminds us that the American church, too often preaching America’s myths as gospel, has not been a fit vessel either.

In any case, we can thank Richard Hughes for his ongoing ministry to both church and, in this case, the nation. May those who have ears to hear, hear.

Lipscomb University

LEE C. CAMP

Response

I want to begin by thanking David Fleer for making *Myths America Lives By* a part of this program. I also want to thank Keith Huey, Arthur Sutherland, and Lee Camp for taking the time and trouble to read and review this book. They have raised a number of important questions on which I would like to comment.

Arthur Sutherland goes to the heart of this book when he mentions the funeral of President Reagan, which featured in a prominent way the words of

Governor John Winthrop, spoken to the settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630. "We shall be a city set on a hill," Winthrop proclaimed. Then Sutherland wryly notes what was missing from Winthrop's vision: it was limited to white men of property. In Winthrop's vision, one finds no blacks, no Native Americans, no women, and no poor.

Reagan's vision for America was remarkably like Winthrop's vision for New England: "It's long been my belief that America is a chosen land, placed by some Divine Providence here between the two oceans to be sought out and found only by those with a special yearning for freedom."³ Upon reading this statement, one can only wonder if Reagan assumed that native populations had no interest in freedom. Clearly, they did not figure into his equation.

We must, however, hasten to add that the problem Sutherland identifies is not limited to Reaganites, Republicans, or conservatives. The problem is the cultural myopia that defines the United States, the tribalism that leads Americans of all political persuasions to imagine that our particular segment of humanity is worthy of consideration while the "others" never register on our screens at all.

For example, we routinely hear of the number of casualties incurred in the war in Iraq, but almost always those numbers pertain only to Americans. One finds a wonderful case in point in a speech delivered in Iowa by then-presidential candidate Howard Dean, often thought to be liberal. In that speech, Dean commented on the casualties of the war up to that point: "There are now almost 400 people dead who wouldn't be dead if that resolution hadn't been passed and we hadn't gone to war." By the time Dean made that speech, however, coalition forces had killed thousands of Iraqi civilians. An organization called Iraq Body Count noted the clear implication of Dean's assertion: "that only the 400 killed coalition forces are 'people,' and that therefore the thousands of killed Iraqis are sub-human and not worthy of mention."⁴

It is precisely because this myopic tribalism is so pervasive in American culture that *Myths America Lives By* begins with these words:

There is perhaps no more compelling task for Americans to accomplish in the twenty-first century than to learn to see the world through someone else's eyes. Those of us who view America as a good and compassionate nation are almost always people who have benefited from its policies. We are not victims of oppression and persecution. To the contrary, we are comfortable and, by and large, content. We have food to eat and houses in which to sleep. We have sources of income and, while there are occasional insecurities, on the whole, we do well. There is, however, another side to this story. It comes from those whose voices are seldom heard—from the poor and the dispossessed, not only in this country but also throughout the world. This book is meant to help us hear their voices more clearly.⁵

³ Ronald Reagan, Remarks at a Swearing-In Ceremony for New United States Citizens, September 17, 1982. *WCPD*, 18–38, p. 1174.

⁴ <http://www.iraqbodycount.net/>

⁵ *Myths America Lives By*, 1.

The book does, indeed, strain to hear the voices of the poor and the dispossessed. That is one side of this book. The other side lies in the fact that it strains to hear those voices in the context of the American Creed, embodied in these words from the "Declaration of Independence": "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

To move between the American Creed, on the one hand, and the voices of the dispossessed, on the other, invites tension, paradox, and ambiguity. When one views American history from the perspective of the poor and the dispossessed, one has reason to be profoundly pessimistic. But when one considers the promise of the American Creed—and even the promise of certain American myths—one has reason to be at least somewhat hopeful. This book seeks to move between these two perspectives.

Both Lee Camp and Keith Huey comment on this dimension of the book, but they respond to that dimension in two very different ways. Huey writes of what he considers the "thoughtful balance" that "is the genius of the book—a critical eye that is respectful nonetheless." On the other hand, Camp worries that this book may be too hopeful, too optimistic, and too sanguine regarding America's myths. Camp therefore asks whether the ironies the book recounts should perhaps "cause us to question this hopefulness."

This is precisely the question raised by a reviewer who wrote in the *Christian Century* the following words: "Having courageously faced the myths' most damaging consequences, Hughes wants us to look past those consequences to find an affirmative hosannah."⁶

At this point, it is fair to share with you some of the history behind this book. The book's first draft contained little of the sense of paradox that defines this book today. I sent that original draft to Robert Bellah—a man I have known and admired ever since I studied with him in the summer of 1975—and asked if he would be willing to write an endorsement.

Bellah responded that if the book remained in its original form, he would have to decline. In the first place, he said, "The basic meaning of 'mythos' is story. And humans are in some very deep way story-telling animals. So a world without myth would be an inhuman world." Then, turning to my manuscript, he wrote, "One way of reading your book would be to think you are telling us [that] all our myths are false, and so you are leaving us with no story at all, which is intolerable."

Then he invited me to compare how this book might play at Pepperdine with how it might play at Berkeley.

Your book would make Mr. Pepperdine and that early President . . . turn over in their graves, which is fine. Your book gives a good shaking up to a conservative community that has taken the myths you debunk far too literally with very bad

⁶ Daniel Born, "A 'chosen people,'" *Christian Century*, January 13, 2004.

results. But think how your book would be read in Berkeley, or in very many American universities as well. It might well only reinforce a left-wing fundamentalism that is as wacky in its own way as the right-wing one you are primarily addressing.⁷

Essentially, Bellah asked me to go back to the drawing boards and to nuance this book with a healthy dose of paradox and ambiguity.

In the meantime, another good friend, Rodney Sawatsky, president of Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania, also read the original text and responded in much the same way. A Canadian Mennonite who understood from sad experience that one-sided, purist claims can become extraordinarily destructive, Sawatsky had been drawn to one of my previous books—*How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind*—precisely because of the way that book celebrated paradox and ambiguity. But where was the sense of paradox in this new book? Sawatsky asked. It struck him as altogether too one-sided.

Bellah and Sawatsky did me a very great favor. They helped me see that in my great disappointment over the way my nation was responding to September 11, 2001, I had forgotten some of the most important teachings of the Christian gospel. I had forgotten, for the moment, that human beings are finite, frail, and inherently flawed; that we inevitably live in a cultural context with all the ambiguities that human culture inevitably brings; that a perfect world lies always beyond our grasp; that we therefore must live by the power of story and myth; and that we finally are saved, not by our ability to know the right or to do the right, but by the unfathomable grace of an infinite God.

The advice I received from Robert Bellah and Rodney Sawatsky helped me recall these truths of the Christian gospel, allowing me—when all was said and done—to celebrate paradox in *Myths America Lives By*, just as I had celebrated paradox in *How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind*. When I wrote, as I did on page 9, that this book is “grounded in my own Christian convictions,” I had in mind not only the Christian mandate to listen carefully to the voices of the poor and the dispossessed. I also had in mind the Christian claim that we “are not justified by observing the law” but by grace through faith, given the extraordinary depth of our own imperfection. It was precisely that conviction that freed me to take seriously, in the context of this book, the themes of paradox and ambiguity that characterize American history from start to finish.

Finally, I want to turn to Keith Huey’s recollection that his students, convinced that while Americans may have been guilty in earlier times—guilty of crimes such as slavery and segregation, for example—today believe they are free of cultural guilt and live in a land marked by radical innocence. In this way, Huey reports, his students “dodged all five of the mythic bullets described in this book.” Huey therefore asks how we can counter such naïve understandings on the part of our students. Huey’s answer: “we must persuasively link the past with the present.”

⁷ Email letter from Robert N. Bellah to Richard Hughes, December 31, 2001.

Indeed, we must. Precisely because the time in which we live is replete with mythic understandings, achieving this task will be difficult. At the same time, the mythic dimensions of our age offer a wealth of illustrations from which to draw as we seek to counter the naïveté of our students. Let me offer some examples.

An obvious example is the naïve but oft-asked question “Why do they hate us?”—a question that reflects in powerful ways the myth of American innocence. That question lurks behind every story of additional deaths in Iraq, behind every report of heightened homeland security, and behind every revelation of civil liberties abridged. It mocks our national weakness and questions our national strength. In truth, it stands at the heart of the American experience today.

How extraordinary it is, then, that Americans have by and large refused to face this question head-on. Instead, following the lead of their president, they have taken refuge in the venerable myth of American innocence—the very myth the question assumes.

To claim our enemies hate us because they hate liberty is simply a way of asserting American innocence without coming to grips with the awful truth that our enemies hate us for many clear and definable reasons.

They hate us because they believe—with some justification that America seeks to control the world both ideologically and economically.

They hate us because they rightly discern that as our way of life encroaches on theirs, their cherished traditions will slowly erode in the face of American capitalism, free market religion, sexual license, and radical individualism.

They hate us because they believe the United States is not as interested in freedom for every nation as in profit for American corporations.

They hate us because they hate the oppression they associate with America’s economic policies abroad.

And they hate us because of our unqualified support for Israel, even when Israel violates democratic principles and mocks the American Creed.

Yet in every scenario the president spins, America always emerges as righteous, just, and innocent in a world filled with demonic forces and shadowy figures who zealously seek to destroy the good.

How should Christians respond?

In order to counter current American myth-making with a biblical vision of reality, Christians should understand that the myth of American innocence is, at its core, a profoundly theological claim that runs completely counter to biblical theology. As Paul writes in Romans 3:

There is no one righteous, not even one;
 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.
 All have turned away,
 they have together become worthless;
 there is no one who does good,
 not even one.

If Americans were to read this passage, they would have no difficulty applying it to others, but great difficulty applying it to themselves.

But what is the source of this myth of American innocence? There are many possible answers to that question, but one is this: the myth of American innocence thrives in a garden that has been cultivated for many years by the myth of American primitivism—a myth that locates the origins of the United States not in time or history, but in “nature” or, put another way, in Eden before the fall. This is the point Jefferson sought to make when he spoke in the Declaration of “self-evident truths,” that is, truths that are rooted not in the vagaries of human history but in the very design of nature. No wonder Jefferson’s colleague Thomas Paine could claim that when we view America, “we are brought at once to the point of seeing government begin as if we had lived in the beginning of time.” In this view, history is irrelevant.

This is a myth that members of Churches of Christ, of all people in the United States, should understand well, for we have made a similar claim, namely, that we have no history but Jesus and the apostles. For that reason, we have been extraordinarily reluctant to recognize *our* frailties and faults. Indeed, the myth of Christian primitivism—the notion that we have restored what Campbell called “the ancient order of things”—has allowed us to claim that we are right while everyone else is wrong.

This same sort of myth has been at work in the American Republic for almost two hundred fifty years, but instead of the primitive church, the Republic has appealed to “Nature and Nature’s God.” Precisely that appeal nurtures the American conviction that while others are evil, we are fundamentally innocent. No wonder Americans—especially white Americans—refuse to deal in any substantive way with the extermination of Native Americans; the enslavement and segregation of African Americans; the fire-bombing of Dresden, resulting in the deaths of half a million people; America’s first use of nuclear weapons on Nagasaki and Hiroshima; and—so we can make the link between America’s past and present as clear as possible—our complicity in helping create Saddam Hussein and, most recently, our willingness to kill ten thousand Iraqi civilians, often children, as we sought to remove this man from power.

Ironically, even as we claim exemption from history and the power of history, this nation seeks to control and manipulate history. Indeed, the president suggested in his State of the Union address, 2003, that “free people will set the course of history.”⁸ But as Arthur Schlesinger Jr. reminded us when America was yet on the verge of its preemptive war against Iraq, “The possibilities of history are far richer and more various than the human mind is likely to conceive—and the arrogance of leaders who are sure they can predict the future invites retribution.”⁹ The persistence of this war, the acceleration of the terror, the growing hostility of Iraqis toward one another and toward the United States, and the estrangement of the United States among the nations of the world have confirmed just how prophetic Schlesinger’s words turned out to be.

⁸ George W. Bush, “State of the Union Address,” 2003.

⁹ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., “The Immorality of Preventive War,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 2002, B15.

The fact that so many Americans remain puzzled by the question, "Why do they hate us," and unwilling to tackle that question head-on suggests that the United States still imagines itself free from the constraints of history and free from the guilt that history inevitably brings.

It also suggests a significant role for Christians and Christian churches who can bring to bear on our current crisis some of the deepest insights of the gospel, namely, the Christian conviction that all human beings—and all nations—are finite, flawed, sinful, and inescapably caught in the ambiguity of the human situation. For this reason, no nation, including the United States, can credibly claim to be "innocent." Indeed, we all labor under the guilt that is the common lot of humankind and that our participation in human history makes inevitable.

However, when our leaders suggest that the United States reflects the will of God built into nature from the beginning of time, that the United States will redeem the world from evil, that the United States is finally in control of human history, and that the United States is fundamentally innocent in a world of evildoers, Christians must counter those assertions and call them by their rightful name: idolatry. For the myth of American innocence is simply an American version of the age-old notion that the state is both lord and god. This is a claim whose peculiarly American dynamic Christians must come to understand and one that Christians must then resist both by word and by deed.

Pepperdine University

RICHARD T. HUGHES

Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method, by JOHN HOWARD YODER. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002. 431 pp. \$34.99.

John Howard Yoder (1927–1997), a Mennonite by religious tradition, was for the last twenty years of his life professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame. Published posthumously, *Preface to Theology* is the instructional content (lectures, worksheets, preparation guides) of the first half of a two-semester course in systematic theology. Although the title indicates the historical place of the book, the subtitle, *Christology and Theological Method*, is more descriptive of its content. Using Christology as its starting point, the book provides both an introduction to, and a methodological approach for, the discipline of systematic theology. Yoder says of his starting point:

The choice of Christology, instead of spending a semester especially talking about God or about sin as a center, is not arbitrary. It was not pulled out of a hat. Part of the reason is that the earliest Christians themselves thought about Christology the most. By following that vein through history, we are never far from the issues that mattered then the most" (39).

The book is divided into three unequal parts. In part 1, "New Testament Themes," Yoder guides his students through the core messages of the early apostolic sermons, the titles of Jesus in the Gospels, the traditional Christological materials circulating in the Christian community that Paul used in his letters, and the Christological thought found in Hebrews and the Johannine literature. In part

2, "Post-Apostolic Theology," Yoder continues to unravel the history of christological understanding and debate by tracing its development through the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, the Apostle's Creed, and the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon. Thus the approach utilized in the book is both inductive and historical. Part 3, "Systematic Treatment of Christological Themes," is greater in length than the first two parts combined. In this section the author systematically treats the christological themes using the "three-fold office" of Christ—prophet, priest, and king—as his organizing structure. In the penultimate chapter Yoder gives a defense for systematics and introduces his students to the various sub-disciplines of theology. A final brief chapter contains, in outline form, the full scope of issues typically dealt with in systematic theology, the field to which this volume has sought to serve as a preface.

The book fulfills its stated objective of providing a solid, christocentric methodology for the ongoing study of theology. One weakness of the volume is the datedness of the scholarly opinion contained therein—a limitation acknowledged by the editors. That limitation aside, the book will be of value to the student of theology who is interested in an excellent introduction to Christology and a methodology for the study of theology.

Pasadena, CA

MARK HOPKINS

At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion, by LARRY W. HURTADO. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. xi + 138 pages. \$16.00.

Larry Hurtado is professor of NT at Edinburgh and the author of many articles on the topic of early Christian devotion. His most important work to date is *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (1988), which propelled him to center stage in the field of Christology. Hurtado's present book, a reworking of lectures given to British Isles Nazarene College, looks at early Christian worship as a means of uncovering the beliefs of the early church about Jesus. *At the Origins of Christian Worship* is succinctly organized into four chapters. The first three chapters deal with the religious background of early Christianity, the characteristics of its worship, and its peculiar adaptation of monotheism to include Jesus. In the final chapter Hurtado indicates what the contemporary Christian community can learn from his findings.

He argues the devotional literature clearly indicates that from an extremely early period Jesus was revered as deity alongside God the Father. Not only did early Christians worship Jesus as God, but they also tenaciously maintained their monotheism. Hurtado calls this inclusion of Christ as deity within the parameters of monotheism "binitarianism."

Hurtado begins by demonstrating that the worship of the traditional Greco-Roman gods was alive and well and that the average person at the time had a full range of choices in the marketplace of religion, Christianity being just one. Although Christianity was similar to the other religions in some ways, its differences were striking, including its conspicuously "low-tech" rituals, its lack of

sacred places, and most of all its exclusivism. For Hurtado, the exclusivity of Christian worship should be considered the primary distinguishing feature of early Christian worship because converts were expected to give up all other gods. While earliest Christianity offered no elaborate rituals or liturgies, it did offer elements important to those in the market for a new religion. These attractive elements included a small intimate group of associates, full participation in the worship assemblies, and exuberance and joy at encountering the deity. Earliest Christian worship involved the believers in a cosmic event that placed them at the intersection between the present age and the age to come, an event in which angels were known to participate. The experience of visible and tangible manifestations of divine power periodically drove this point home; and despite its lack of elaborate ritual and exclusive emphasis, early Christian worship was a worthy competitor with the traditional religions.

The heart of the book is chapter 3, in which Hurtado reasserts the thesis that early Christian worship of Christ was a unique form of monotheism that allowed for the worship of an additional figure as God. He systematically addresses the scholarly objections to his binitarian thesis by pointing out that consistent, not sporadic, references to Jesus in settings clearly reserved for worship of deity (prayers, confessions, baptism, Lord's Supper, hymns, and prophecy) bolster his overall argument. In short, from the earliest period the church revered Jesus as God not because they *could*, but because they felt they *must*.

Hurtado concludes with an attempt to relate his findings to the modern Christian community for whom the book is supposedly written. He suggests that many worshipers are unwitting "ditheists" who worship God and Jesus as if they were two different entities. The author also addresses feminist criticisms of monotheism as an expression of patriarchal oppression, but warns conservative Christians against falling into the trap of idolatry through emphasizing the "maleness" of God. Finally, Hurtado suggests that, in addition to correcting our worship language about Christ, modern worship should emphasize the sense of transcendence and eschatological expectation evident in the early Church.

The strength of the book is Hurtado's survey of the religious environment of the first century and Christianity's place in it. His primary point, that the religious market place was vibrant and alive, is well taken and needs to be reaffirmed in Western civilization and church history courses. Despite the stiff competition, "homely" complexion, and low-tech rituals, Christian worship was attractive. Evidently there is something to be said for simplicity in religious worship. Hurtado's lucid and organized treatment of the christological passages brings the text alive by revealing how little-pondered texts can become instructive indicators of the Church's attitude toward Christ.

A fundamental weakness of the book concerns its schizophrenic focus. Supposedly, it was intended primarily for the worshipping Christian, with an ancillary goal of satisfying academic non-believers who want to listen in on the conversation. But Hurtado seems much more at home writing purely for academics. His frequent technical asides and professional jousts with opponents indicate it is the worshipping Christian, not the academic, who is really the

eavesdropper. The final chapter's reflections for the modern church hardly go beyond vague suggestions, and the extensive discussion of feminist hang-ups with monotheism seems more like a pet peeve of the author than a burning issue for worshipping Christians. Also, although Hurtado is genuinely concerned with the church, he fails to take into account the impact of his research conclusions on it. One example is his seeming aloofness to the ramifications of his binitarian vocabulary for Christians who today worship God as Trinity. Hurtado casually points out that in the NT the Holy Spirit is not a recipient of worship, but provides no theological framework into which this "historical observation" can be placed except to say that worship of the Holy Spirit is based on later Trinitarian theology. Most worshipping Christians reading books published by Eerdmans would expect a more thorough explanation.

The subject matter of *At the Origins of Christian Worship* is important, and a renewal of serious Christology in our churches is essential to our revitalization. However, the book fits awkwardly into the literature. On the one hand, for college courses on Christology, one would prefer Hurtado's first book rather than the present one. On the other hand, for a congregational study of Christology, its lack of focus and sensitivity to the important theological issues it raises severely limits its usefulness.

Simon Fraser University

DARREN T. WILLIAMSON

Revelation and the End of All Things, by CRAIG R. KOESTER. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. xxx + 209 pp. \$18.00.

This is a good book for those with a basic level of understanding of Revelation. Koester explains many difficult topics in a simple and straightforward manner accessible for an undergraduate or a church Sunday school class. He provides balance to the various views of Revelation and holds a historical view of the biblical text.

Koester begins by explaining various theories of interpretation of Revelation. He critiques the approaches as well as the recent emphasis on millennialism. He is current with his overview and writes a section on the recent "Left Behind" series. Koester also briefly overviews the interpretations from the beginnings of Christianity to the present and offers discussion and critique of each view. He ends chapter 1 with a reflection of Revelation in the songs and worship of the church. Koester provides strong evidence for a historical view from both ancient history and the genre of apocalyptic literature.

Chapters 2-7 discuss Revelation from the perspective of the Caesar cult worship emphasis that dominated the Asian culture in John's time. Koester interprets themes and selected texts from this historical framework. He continues to keep the themes of the suffering Messiah and suffering church at the forefront of the discussion. According to Koester, Satan used the Roman Empire as well as the zealotry of Asians and Jews to persecute God's people in their attempt to leave idolatry and turn to Jesus.

The Lamb of God is the victorious one who overcame the enemy through suffering and death. This theme provides a model for the early Christians in Asia during their time of trial. Victory is promised to those who suffer, endure, and die as Jesus suffered and died. In the end the church wins the battle because it is faithful until death, just as was the Lamb.

This book's greatest contribution is its simplicity. The prevalence of the *Left Behind Series* and Hal Lindsey texts has made it difficult to teach students a historical view with equal simplicity. Koester's book will enlighten students and seekers to the current research on apocalyptic literature, archaeology of ancient Asia Minor, and Roman history as well as its effect on the interpretation of Revelation.

Cascade College

RON CLARK

Renewing God's People: A Concise History of the Churches of Christ, by GARY HOLLOWAY and DOUGLAS A. FOSTER. Abilene: ACU Press, 2001. 151 pp. \$14.95.

Grounded in solid scholarship and written in popular style, this book is designed for teachers and armchair historians who desire a concise and trustworthy account of their heritage in the Churches of Christ. The marks of this genre are particularly evident at the conclusion of each chapter, where readers can find thoughtful questions for discussion and recommendations for deeper study. Along the way, they will meet a transparent agenda that is unmistakably worthwhile but not without its problems.

Holloway and Foster are clearly sympathetic to the cause they have chronicled, to the point of assuring their readers that Barton Stone's adherents "taught the truth" about baptism (55). Their coverage is quite traditional in other respects, as well, with disproportionate attention (more than half of the book) devoted to the heroic, antebellum phase of the movement.

Like others before them, the authors have emphasized the "back to the Bible" vision that characterized so much of the movement's early impulse. They have rightly departed, however, from an exclusively restorationist interpretation and have concluded that "to be the pure church of the Bible was not an end in itself" (25). According to their portrayal, the Restoration Movement was chiefly conceived as a quest for Christian unity; thus the movement's beginnings present an imitable standard for the deeply divided fellowship of present-day Churches of Christ. No mere historians, Holloway and Foster reveal the depth of their pastoral commitments, and this book naturally culminates with a series of challenging exhortations.

The authors' sympathy for the Restoration Movement does not prevent them from offering a host of critical and provocative insights. Their excellent chapter on the Civil War, for instance, candidly concludes that the movement was fractured by sectional hostilities. Even bolder is their story of the Church's acquiescence in twentieth-century culture (including racism) and their appraisal of a present-day "identity crisis."

Their foundational vision of a "unity movement," however, needs to be established more convincingly. They cite Nathan Hatch's *Democratization of American Christianity* (for "further reading"), but their vision has obscured the profoundly political character of the Restoration phenomenon. It is true that Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell used ecumenical rhetoric, but that language was largely defensive and derivative. Zealous for "union with the Body of Christ at large," Holloway and Foster scarcely address the populism that dominates a treatise such as the *Last Will and Testament*; similarly, when they assess the anti-clerical harangues of the *Christian Baptist*, they blithely assert that Campbell was clearing ground for the restoration of "New Testament Christianity and the unity of the early church" (48).

In addition, their coverage seems tendentiously selective, claiming the movement's most irenic episodes (however anomalous) as formative, defining moments and painting its manifold divisions as departures from the historic ideal. An entire chapter (53–63), for instance, is devoted to the Stone-Campbell merger of 1832 with an emphasis on its inspirational but regrettably singular ethos. Likewise, T. B. Larimore is featured (98–101) in spite of the fact that his generous message was largely repudiated (as the authors themselves lament). These topics are important, and they deserve an accurate portrayal, but one must ask about the actual weight of their influence.

These points aside, Holloway and Foster deliver a unique and vital product. The rest of the story speeds through David Lipscomb, Foy E. Wallace Jr., Batsell Barrett Baxter, and other significant leaders. The authors cover an astonishing breadth of material with few, if any, indefensible omissions. Their coverage might leave us wishing for more, but that is good, and a book that aims to be brief should not be criticized for its brevity. Despite their rapid-fire arrangement, these accounts provide a coherent picture of the fellowship whose hermeneutical foundations have led to a perplexing array of controversies and divisions. If the authors have partially misread the original motives behind the movement, I believe they have succeeded, nonetheless, with an accessible, introspective, and qualified production.

Rochester College

KEITH B. HUEY

Reading the Bible in Faith, Theological Voices from the Pastorate, edited by WILLIAM H. LAZARETH. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. 206 pp. \$15.00.

Reading the Bible in Faith is a product of the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, New Jersey. The center is not affiliated with any denomination or institution, and the book grows from the Center's desire to focus attention on "ordained ministry as a theological vocation and the church as a theological community" (xiv). The writers are thus all pastors who work in local congregations of various denominations.

The book is divided into two major divisions, "Holy Scripture and Holy Church," with six subdivisions: "Hermeneutical Challenges," "The Passion of Christ," "The Binding of Isaac," "Trinitarian Doctrine," "Divine Worship," and

“Christian Proclamation.” Based on the conviction that theological work emanates from the daily, reflective life of the church, each of the topics was given to a group of pastors—people woven into the woof and warp of church life—rather than academic professionals. The brevity of the articles has some appeal for the busy reader though brevity should not be construed as a lack of theological insight. The book contains good theological reflection without attempting to produce systematic theology.

Another underlying conviction is that the church will not be renewed by “management skills, goal-setting processes, reorganization, public relations, or conflict management” (x). The church is a theological community and must utilize what has been given by God to sustain and nurture it. Growing healthy churches depends less on technique and more on theological content; problems with churches may have more to do with theological foundations than some prefer to admit.

As expected in such a work, not all articles are created equal, but overall the quality is good. For those with bored, cynical Scripture readers in their pews, “The Baptized Imagination” might offer a welcome antidote. This and many other articles never cease to extol the importance of Scripture as the source of what makes the church distinctly the church and the importance of the community that is shaped by it. The importance of the religious leader in helping the community become what its Scriptures determine is the focus of “A Koinonia of Pastors.” This might even be a welcome antidote to the bored, cynical Scripture reader in the pulpit.

This is a well-thought-out attempt to locate renewal within the thinking and work of the local minister and through his significance as theologian for his flock. That the answers to modern problems lie not only with his work but also with the Scriptures that help define what the church is ring as true today as ever.

Those of us in Restoration churches will find many of the insights similar to our own. These pastors from predominantly mainline denominations have struggled with doctrinal problems that have damaged the fidelity and effectiveness of their churches. That so much of their rhetoric encourages the readers to base their faith and life on Scripture ought to remind us that we need not give up a position of strength that many churches wish they had not left.

Chatham, NJ

ROBERT T. WEBER

The Canon Debate, edited by LEE MARTIN MCDONALD and JAMES A. SANDERS. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002. x + 662 pp. \$39.95.

The nature, origin, and evolving function of the biblical canon(s) in Judaism and Christianity remain a standing problem. The thirty-one authors of the thirty-two articles in this outstanding collection include most of the leaders of the debate on the canon in the English-speaking world. Along with the helpful appendices, indices, and bibliography concluding the book, these articles present state-of-the-art discussions of the key issues surrounding the biblical canon.

The editors' introductory essay both summarizes the contents of the book and positions it in the larger debate. Careful to distinguish between Scripture and canon, they set forth the major questions: What is a biblical canon, and how did the idea function at the critical era, the time of Jesus? Why did discussions of the scope of the OT continue for centuries after Jesus? Does the citation of a book in ancient writers imply that it was part of their canon? What sources best reflect the earliest strand of Christian faith? Should oral Jesus traditions be canonized? What is the relationship between text and canon? Why do ancient manuscripts vary in content? And what criteria did the church use to decide canonicity? These questions remain controversial and are likely to do so for some time.

The remainder of the book is arranged in two parts, "The Old/First Testament Canon" and "The New/Second Testament Canon," consisting of fifteen and sixteen essays, respectively. The essays exhaustively examine historical and theological issues in a way that is probably unequaled in English and unlikely to be surpassed soon.

The OT essays examine "The Notion and Definition of Canon" (Eugene Ulrich), "The Jewish Scriptural Canon in Cultural Perspective" (Philip R. Davies), "The Formation of the Hebrew Bible Canon: Isaiah as a Test Case" (Joseph Blenkinsopp), "The Septuagint: The Bible of Hellenistic Judaism" (Albert Sundberg Jr.), "Questions of Canon Viewed through the Dead Sea Scrolls" (James VanderKam), "Josephus and His Twenty-two Book Canon" (Steve Mason), "Origins of a Tripartite Old Testament Canon" (Julio C. Trebolle Barrera), "Jamnia Revisited" (Jack P. Lewis), "The Rabbis' Bible: The Canon of the Hebrew Bible and the Early Rabbinic Guild" (Jack Lightstone), "The Scriptures of Jesus and His Earliest Followers" (Craig Evans), "The Old Testament Apocrypha in the Early Church and Today" (Daniel J. Harrington, SJ), "The Pseudepigrapha in the Early Church" (William Adler), "The Codex and Canon Consciousness" (Robert A. Kraft), "The Status of the Masoretic Text in Modern Text Editions of the Hebrew Bible: The Relevance of Canon" (Emanuel Tov), and "The Issue of Closure in the Canonical Process" (James A. Sanders). The clarification of major issues (Lewis, Tov, Sanders), the explication of evidence (in all the articles), and the demolition of some consenses (Harrington, Adler) are significant. Ulrich's dictum "First, the canon involves books, not the textual form of the books; secondly, it requires reflective judgment; and thirdly, it denotes a closed list" (31), though not followed by all the authors, is a helpful clarification. The first item is especially useful as we consider the textual criticism of, say, Jeremiah or Job.

The second section covers both historical issues related to the New Testament and the abiding theological relevance of the canon as a whole. It becomes clear here that canon-making is integral to Christianity (and, earlier, Judaism), and even that the Gospel-Apostle format of the New Testament inevitably follows the structure of the Christian message itself. Essays include: "The New Testament Canon: Recent Research and the Status Questionis" (Harry Gamble), "Factors Leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon: A Survey of Some Recent Studies" (Everett Ferguson), "Reflections on

Jesus and the New Testament Canon" (William Farmer), "Marcion Revisited" (John Barton), "Gnosticism and the Hebrew Bible" (PHEME PERKINS), "Evidence for an Early Christian Canon (Second and Third Centuries)" (Peter Balla), "The New Testament Canon of Eusebius" (Everett Kalin), "The Muratorian Fragment and the Origins of the New Testament Canon" (Geoffrey Mark Hahemann), "Identifying Scripture and Canon in the Early Church: The Criteria Question" (Lee Martin McDonald), "The Problem of Pseudonymity in Biblical Literature and Its Implications for Canon Formation" (Kent Clarke), "The Greek New Testament as a Codex" (Daryl Schmidt), "Issues in the Interrelation of New Testament Textual Criticism and Canon" (Eldon Jay Epp), "The Canonical Structure of Gospel and Apostle" (Francois Bovon), "The Significance of a Canonical Perspective of the Church's Scripture" (Robert Wall), "The Once and Future New Testament" (Robert Funk), and "Has the Canon a Continuing Function?" (James D. G. Dunn).

While essays in a collection inevitably exhibit various levels of competence and cogency, this assemblage of articles is exceptionally high in quality. The dense erudition and clear-headedness of virtually all the pieces testify to the skill of the editors. Scholars, students, and preachers who study seriously will find here a treasure trove of information. The many Christians who find the uncertainty of the early history of the canon disconcerting will discover here, if not reassurance that the church got it right, at least a sense that the formation of the canon reflects an intense process of theological discernment, one that continues unabated.

Abilene Christian University

MARK HAMILTON

The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Collected Essays, by J. J. M. ROBERTS
Winona Lake, WI: Eisenbrauns, 2002. xiv + 434 pp. \$42.50.

Roberts, author of these collected essays, is William Henry Green Professor of Old Testament Literature at Princeton Theological Seminary. The essays appeared in major journals and in books, including *festschriften* from 1970 to the present. Roberts's teaching and research interests are in comparative studies between Mesopotamian and Israelite religion, Old Testament prophecy, Semitic languages, and Hebrew lexicography. He is currently working on a commentary on Isaiah 1-39 for the Hermeneia series. The essays in this book reflect all these interests.

The essays are divided into five categories. (1) "Fundamental Issues" reflect on the manner of relating extra-biblical materials to those of the OT. Roberts is of the conviction that past efforts have not been rigorous enough, especially in the biblical theology movement, in either understanding the available Mesopotamian corpus or in accurately comparing and contrasting these materials with those of the OT. (2) "Themes and Motifs" reflect on theological seams running through the OT, for example, the hand of God as an indication of his action, the theological ramifications of the legal metaphors, and of whether God lies. In these essays Roberts provides provocative insights not only for the

scholar but for the minister. For example, in whether God lies, he points out that God does send strong delusions upon those who resist his will. He concludes: "Can one trust God? Maybe, but only at the price of obedience and a genuine love for the truth, no matter how unpleasant that truth may be. Without those ingredients in one's response to God, the divine lie remains a distinct and terrifying possibility" (131). The last entry in this section contains Roberts's translation of the Mari prophetic texts. These meticulous translations have not previously been published. The Mari texts are especially important for assessing wherein Hebrew prophecy differs from that in the OT. (3) "Solving Difficult Problems: New Readings of Old Texts" bring to bear some of Roberts' special studies in Mesopotamian and Qumran materials. These articles focus upon difficult texts in the Psalms and Isaiah. (4) "Kingship and Messiahship" highlights Zion theology in Psalms and Isaiah. Roberts is convinced that the major theological trajectory underlying Isaiah 1-39 has to do with Isaiah's view that Zion provides a firm refuge only when the kings and royalty act in righteousness and justice and trust Yahweh rather than foreign alliances. These materials are especially insightful and adumbrate the sorts of perceptiveness we can expect in his Hermeneia commentary. (5) "Interpreting Prophecy" comments on methods in appropriating prophetic statements in the OT as well as anticipating some of the ways in which prophetic statements may be employed in the NT. Roberts concludes that prophecy always contains a degree of mystery and that "it is this element of the unexpected which puts a keener edge on our expectations" (418).

We are greatly indebted to Roberts for making these essays available in this convenient form. Through them we receive as excellent insight into the directions of OT studies in the past thirty years in the American Albright school, of which Roberts is a member. We also are given new insights into how Mesopotamian materials shed light on the OT and some of the theological seams that persist throughout.

South Berwick, ME

THOMAS H. OLBRICHT

The Old Religion in a New World: The History of American Christianity, by MARK A. NOLL. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. 340 pp. \$24.00.

At its best, history is a work of identification, helping people understand their roots and destination in life. As usual, history is at its best in the skillful hands of Mark Noll. Noll, the Carolyn and Francis McManis Professor of Christian Thought at Wheaton College, has earned a reputation for thorough analysis and highly readable writing. His popularity in the pan-denominational Evangelical market is evidenced by the response to works such as *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, and his respect in serious academic circles is well deserved.

In *The Old Religion in a New World*, Noll offers a valuable asset for both the serious scholar and the amateur historian. It stands as a companion volume with *The Democratization of American Christianity*, by Nathan Hatch, and *Illusions of Innocence*, by Richard Hughes and Leonard Allen, in providing a framework for understanding the role of Christianity in America. Noll focuses on the aspects

of practice and belief that distinguish American Christianity from its European roots, the great variety of practice in the "new world" since early colonial days, and Christianity's pervasive impact in American culture through the present day. Noll considers the impact of race, ethnicity, and regional subcultures on belief and practice. He also compares the experience of Christianity in the United States, Mexico, and Canada.

Aside from the well-written, accessible text, Noll's greatest contribution is the extensive footnotes. His research is wide-ranging and evident, with the notes inviting the reader to follow a variety of topics in greater detail.

Noll's book is critically important for children of the American Restoration Movement. For many years the notion of being neither Protestant, Catholic nor Jew has been an accepted assumption. Noll, who has given a degree of credibility to American Restoration History in recent years, offers a corrective to that particular illusion of innocence by placing the movement within the context of a wide variety of American church movements. Noll highlights the consequences and benefits of being both a child of the Restoration and stepchild of European Christianity, reminding his readers that, rather than being neither Protestant, Catholic nor Jew, American Christians are all three.

Ruckersville, VA

STEPHEN J. WALLS MATHIS

Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method, edited by JOHN G. STACKHOUSE JR. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002. 215 pp. \$16.99.

A welcome and needed discussion of evangelical theological methodology, this book draws together papers originally read at the annual Theology Conference at Regent College in October 1999. The collection is amended with three responses intended to represent different points along the spectrum of evangelical thought. Chief among the thorny issues tackled are the nature of biblical authority, the why of hermeneutics, the role tradition plays in theology, and the relationship of theology to philosophy.

The heart of the book, and its obvious strength, is its second section, wherein Kevin Vanhoozer and Stanley Grenz each propose a methodological program. Both are especially concerned to maintain a high view of Scripture that avoids propositionalism on the one hand and addresses issues raised by the advent of postmodernity on the other. Each proposes viable postfoundationalist responses that have drawn on speech-act theory; thus both speak of the illocutionary force of the Scriptural text as the key matter. Each is also indebted to George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model as each attempts to modify Lindbeck's postliberal approach by relocating the source of theology from the believing community to the canon. Vanhoozer, drawing on the theater as an analogy, likens doctrine to "direction" shaped by canonical wisdom. Grenz, influenced by Wolfhart Pannenberg's coherentism, likens doctrine to a "web of belief" or a "mosaic" of interlocking tiles. Each metaphor thankfully succeeds in advancing evangelicalism beyond propositionalism.

Alister McGrath's opening essay points the way for the collection, appraising the state of the art of evangelical theological method and naming the relevant issues and challenges. The second essay, by John Stackhouse, provides the parameters, defining what the methodology should still look like in the end if it is to remain evangelical. The third and fourth essays, on methodology, by Vanhoozer and Grenz comprise part 2, "Programmatic Proposals," and are the reason the collection will gain an audience among non-evangelicals. A third section, "Engaging Tradition and Traditions," has two excellent essays by McGrath and Stephen Williams that model thoughtful engagement with church tradition and with individual theological traditions (including Cone and Bonhoeffer). The final section offers three short, diverse responses to what has gone before by J. I. Packer, Trevor Hart, and Roger Olson. The first affirms the spirit of the enterprise, especially the engagement of voices from all Christian traditions as those of brothers and sisters, while cautiously commending aspects of Vanhoozer's and Grenz's methodologies.

Trevor Hunt pleads for a more esteemed place for the imagination among the chief resources used in evangelical theological method. The third, by Roger Olson, summarizes and affirms the "postconservative tenor" of the contributions, correctly observing they are marked by "a lack of fear," "a concern with evangelical identity," "a search for truth," "a respect for doctrinal heritage," and "a role for experience."

Evangelical readers may rightly be dissatisfied that the full range of evangelical thought is not represented in the volume (does J. I. Packer represent the right or the center of evangelical thought?), although it is difficult to imagine that all evangelicals would agree that theological methodology is even needed. Non-evangelical readers will undoubtedly find some of the book's concerns irrelevant (would a book on mainline Protestant theological methodology need a chapter defending tradition as a secondary source for theology?). The probability that both will occur suggests the book has struck the right, ideological balance.

Some chapters are simply less interesting than others. For example, the chapter by Stackhouse (who has assigned himself the unenviable task of defining what an evangelical is and what evangelical theology should therefore continue to be) lacks the urgency of Williams' "prophetic" call for evangelicals to develop a social ethic. McGrath's introductory chapter, although necessary and clearly stated, lacks the suspense of J. I. Packer's carefully worded response to Stanley Grenz's Pannenbergian coherentism or Vanhoozer's postconservative canonical-linguistic approach. None of the writers, however, fails to contribute meaningfully to the conversation.