The Historical Journal, 57, 2 (2014), pp. 571–592 © Cambridge University Press 2014
doi:10.1017/S0018246X1400003X

REVIEW ARTICLE

PROTESTANTISM IN A MULTI-CULTURAL EARLY AMERICA

The baptism of early Virginia: how religion created race. By Rebecca Anne Goetz. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012. Pp. xiii + 223. ISBN 1421407000. £28.50.

Conceived in doubt: religion and politics in the new American nation. By Amanda Porterfield. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. Pp. xi + 252. ISBN 0226675122. £28.00.

The first prejudice: religious tolerance and intolerance in early America. Edited by Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Grenda. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. Pp. vi + 401. ISBN 081224270X. £29.50.

A harmony of the spirits: translation and the language of community in early Pennsylvania. By Patrick M. Erben. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012. Pp. xiv + 335. ISBN 0807835579. £38.95.

Heavenly merchandize: how religion shaped commerce in puritan America. By Mark Valeri. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. Pp. xiii + 337. ISBN 0691143595. £27.95.

The Indian Great Awakening: religion and the shaping of Native cultures in early America. By Linford D. Fisher. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. xii + 296. ISBN 0199740046. £22.99.

New Israel/New England: Jews and puritans in early America. By Michael Hoberman. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011. Pp. xiv + 281. ISBN 1558499202. £24.95.

New Netherland and the Dutch origins of American religious liberty. By Evan Haefeli. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. Pp. xiv + 355. ISBN 0812244087. £29.50.

Phillis Wheatley: biography of a genius in bondage. By Vincent Carretta. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011. Pp. xiv + 279. ISBN 0820333387. £25.95.

Red brethren: the Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians and the problem of race in early America. By David J. Silverman. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010. Pp. xii + 279. ISBN 0801444772. £28.50.

Roger Williams and the creation of the American soul: church, state, and the birth of liberty. By John M. Barry. New York: Viking, 2011. Pp. 464. ISBN 0670023051. £20.00.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X1400003X Published online by Cambridge University Press

When Benjamin Franklin met the Reverend Whitefield: Enlightenment, revival, and the power of the printed word. By Peter Charles Hoffer. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011. Pp. 156. ISBN 1421403129. £10.50.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, Jon Butler and other prominent historians of early American religion reshaped the field by maintaining that as a belief system and as a set of institutions, Protestant Christianity increased in influence from the time of the founding of the first English colonies in North America through the colonial era.[1] They were arguing against Perry Miller's insistence that the trajectory of American religious life could be traced by closely examining the evolving preoccupations of New England's clergy. As Miller described them, the puritan clergymen of New England and their successors left us a pained commentary on the waning of an old ideal, the eclipse of any aspiration to create a church-centred social order. In Miller's New England, the moral authority that had once been wielded by puritan clergymen was eventually assumed by lawyers.[2] The process he described had a peculiarly American drama about it, but it was, in effect, just the general global trend that would continue through the nineteenth century and beyond. It was what other scholars of Miller's era called modernization. In 1997, reviewing what he saw as the 'Post-puritan paradigm of early American religious history', Charles L. Cohen identified several academic trends that contributed to the marginalization of Miller, the New England clergy, and the idea of religious decline.[3] In the late twentieth century, studies of popular religion expanded the field of inquiry beyond the doctrines, sermons, and laments of clergymen. Quantitative social history provided new ways to measure the presence, if not the influence, of religious institutions, and specifically within the field of early American history, many historians turned away from New England and identified other places such as Virginia, South Carolina, and Pennsylvania as cultural hearths. Cohen did not explicitly link the scholarly trend to the events of the previous two decades, but after the election of Jimmy Carter in 1976 many academics, especially in New England, were stunned by the expanding influence of religion

[1] See especially Jon Butler, *Awash in a sea of faith: Christianizing the American people* (Cambridge, MA, 1990); Patricia Bonomi, *Under the cope of heaven: religion, society, and politics in colonial America* (New York, NY, 1986). See also Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Commerce and culture: the maritime communities of colonial Massachusetts, 1690–1750* (New York, NY, 1984). Late twentieth-century works on the early national period that similarly emphasize the increasing influence of religion include Nathan O. Hatch, *The democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT, 1994), and Heyrman, *Southern cross: the beginnings of the Bible belt* (New York, NY, 1997).

[2] See Perry Miller, *The New England mind: the seventeenth century* (Boston, MA, 1961); Miller, *The New England mind from colony to province* (Boston, MA, 1961); Miller, *The life of the mind in America, from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York, NY, 1965).

[3] Charles L. Cohen, 'The post-puritan paradigm of early American religious history', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 54 (1997), pp. 695–722.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X1400003X Published online by Cambridge University Press

in American public life. Secularization was no longer the issue. The religiosity of Americans was the phenomenon that demanded explanation.[4]

The historical agenda has shifted since then. Most historians of early American religion assume that religious ideas and institutions were persistently, and in many places and times increasingly, powerful. Today, debates are more likely to surface over the ability of competing religious groups to coexist. While this is not a new issue for historical inquiry, it has gained new impetus as a result of recent historiographic trends, particularly the more widespread adoption of continental and Atlantic perspectives which situate the mainland British colonies and the early United States within a varied mix of societies in eastern North America and around the ring of the ocean. There has also been a contemporary political impetus for studying the problem of religious toleration and interactions between adherents of differing faiths. Some of the challenges that Protestant settlers posed and faced in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century North America seem to have resurfaced (at least in general terms) in the fraught relations between American Protestants and Muslims at home and around the world in the twenty-first century. Recognizing this, in the preface to his work on colonial New Netherland Evan Haefeli invokes the controversies swirling around the '9/11 mosque' in New York City.[5] Rebecca Anne Goetz, discussing colonial Virginia, similarly makes reference to 11 September.[6] Given the troubled contemporary context within which scholars are re-examining the problem of religious toleration, it is remarkable how upbeat most of them are in their assessments of American behaviour. For many historians, the big question to be answered is how Americans became so tolerant.

Much of the recent literature on religious toleration in early America measures historical actors against an assumed, present-day, mildly Christian, liberal consensus. Many historians continue to construct narratives seeking to explain, in Haefeli's words, 'when, where, and with whom tolerance started'. 'Was it Revolutionary statesmen such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison? An earlier colonial figure such as William Penn or Roger Williams? A particular denomination such as the Baptists? Or a particular colony like Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, or South Carolina?'[7] As this review will show, some of the scholars who ask such questions fail to define 'toleration' precisely. They take it for granted that their readers live in a society infused with the spirit of religious liberty, and therefore know what it is. This confidence is almost certainly misplaced; as any observer of the Supreme Court's First Amendment jurisprudence will attest, even today Americans remain unsure about what behaviours their adherence to religious liberty protects. Other scholars recognize the complexity of this issue and some take a more sceptical stance, but even among those who argue against any comforting progressive narrative,

[4] See Butler, *Awash in a sea of faith*, p. 1; Porterfield, *Conceived in doubt*, p. 11, commenting on Hatch's work.
[5] Haefeli, *New Netherland*, p. ix.
[6] Goetz, *Baptism of early Virginia*, p. 11.
[7] Haefeli, *New Netherland*, p. 1.

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it is common to encounter similarly ahistorical assumptions, particularly when writers label historical actors hypocrites for failing to live up to presumably eternal, egalitarian Christian norms. Since its inception, Christianity has always included tolerant and intolerant elements. To understand the pattern of relations among Protestants and between them and others in early America, it is necessary to respect and examine the internal dynamics and evolution of American Christianity itself. The early American culture of toleration, as it developed, paradoxically could not allow churches to operate as they had before. The embrace of religious liberty required adjustments to the practices, aspirations, and fundamental tenets of several prominent communions. These adaptations affected more than America's religious life. As the works reviewed here make clear, the attention scholars have recently devoted to the problem of religious toleration has enriched our understanding of an array of issues of historical and continuing concern, including the morality of market capitalism, gender and race relations, the cultural survival of Native Americans, and partisan division within the United States.

A fine collection of essays edited by Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Grenda, *The first prejudice: religious tolerance and intolerance in early America*, provides a survey of historical work in this field in all its complexity. The contributors examine Native Americans, African Americans, and Euro-American Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, and approach the problem of toleration from a range of perspectives. Some of the essays are bleak. John Corrigan, for example, recounts how American Protestants from the seventeenth century through the era of Andrew Jackson invoked biblical analogies to justify genocidal violence against Native Americans.[8] Nonetheless, in their introduction the editors adopt an unapologetically whiggish stance. Beneke and Grenda attribute the early republic's embrace of religious liberty to the revolutionary generation's recognition of 'the essential interiority of belief and the inevitability of religious differences'. 'Even if the resulting diversity was not intrinsically appealing to contemporaries, they now understood that the varieties of human experiences and perspectives made the pursuit of uniformity as impractical as it was dangerous.'[9] In the late eighteenth century, Americans also came to recognize that it was not enough to grant 'liberty of conscience'. Religious liberty required allowing the free exercise of religious practices.[10]

Beneke and Grenda acknowledge that historians of Europe have approached the problem of religious diversity differently. For centuries, members of diverse religious groups have lived side-by-side in Europe and elsewhere without professing toleration as a guiding principle. European historians have observed persistent patterns of co-existence grounded in pragmatic, contingent circumstances. With this in mind, scholars have been able to examine relations

[8] John Corrigan, 'Amalek and the rhetoric of extermination', in Beneke and Grenda, eds., *The first prejudice*, pp. 53–72.
[9] Beneke and Grenda, eds., *The first prejudice*, p. 6.
[10] Ibid., p. 7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X1400003X Published online by Cambridge University Press

between religious groups without falling into the facile habit, common among Americans, of finding fault with those whose liberalism had limits, and declaring historical figures like Thomas Jefferson hypocrites.[11] Nonetheless, Beneke and Grenda pull back from recommending the European model as a way of understanding American religious history because they see an unusual trajectory in the American story toward disestablishment, religious freedom, and egalitarianism generally. Grenda suggests that the revolutionary era's embrace of the rights of minority faiths anticipated a later, wider transformation, 'when American culture accommodated the rights of individualism and the pursuit of individual fulfilment as a basis for the American civil order'.[12]

According to Beneke and Grenda, the progress of liberalism in America should compel historians to adjust the way they examine the problem of religious toleration in the colonial and early national period. Before the American Revolution, however, that progress, such as it was, did not affect all of the colonies equally, and the story varies even more if we include within our field of study people other than the English-speaking religious and political leaders who have traditionally dominated the whiggish narrative. Haefeli's *New Netherland and the Dutch origins of American religious liberty* contains a cautionary argument against developing a linear narrative. Haefeli provides a detailed history of interdenominational struggle in New Netherland, the original Dutch colony in the mid-Atlantic region, which occupied territory now included in Pennsylvania and New Jersey as well as New York. He situates New Netherland within the context of the Dutch empire, highlighting the influence of events in places as far afield as Sweden and Brazil. In the first half of the seventeenth century the Netherlands themselves were still negotiating their own political structures and the parameters of their tradition of toleration. Within the United Provinces, Dutch Reformed Calvinists, Lutherans, Mennonites, Jews, and Catholics jostled with each other. The Dutch Reformed, who officially set policy, were often divided amongst themselves, and varied in their approaches to different groups, depending on whether the targeted community was seen as likely recruits for admission into the officially recognized 'public church'. 'Toleration' meant many different things for different communities in the various Dutch provinces. The confusion was compounded almost exponentially when the conflicting signals emanating from the Netherlands were refracted across an empire that included territories on four continents and associated islands inhabited by a diverse array of peoples including Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists. New Netherland's leaders were more strictly Calvinist than most other Dutch colonial authorities, but they did not control their destiny. Conflicting material interests, military contingencies, religious convictions, and

[11] Ibid., p. 9.

[12] Grenda, 'Faith, reason, and Enlightenment: the cultural sources of toleration in early America', in Beneke and Grenda, eds., *The first prejudice*, pp. 23–52, at p. 25. See also Beneke and Grenda, eds., *The first prejudice*, p. 1.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X1400003X Published online by Cambridge University Press

international rivalries pulled the colony in different directions, leading to contrasting policies for New Netherland's Lutherans, Quakers, and Jews. Each of these religious groups advocated for its own interests and paid little attention to the others, and no denomination pressed for anything like universal religious freedom.

Ironically, Haefeli suggests that military threats and actual conquests were the main stimuli for the expansion of toleration in New Netherland. The Dutch conquest of New Sweden, which coincided with a military threat from nearby Native American groups, led to an accommodation with the Swedish Lutherans allowing them, but no other Lutherans, to maintain a church. Later on a grander scale, the English conquest of New Netherland in 1664 led to a new set of concessions. The English colonial leaders in the early years belonged to a religious persuasion (a conservative Anglicanism bordering on Catholicism) that virtually no one in the colony embraced. Therefore, it was prudent for them to tolerate nearly everyone. Haefeli reminds us that toleration means different things from the perspectives of the tolerated and those who tolerate. Defining the limits of toleration always entails an element of struggle, a test of wills that reflects the distribution of power within a given society at any moment. Toleration, as Haefeli presents it, is situational, contingent, and historically specific. We cannot understand it if we study it only as an ideal.

Patrick M. Erben's *A harmony of the spirits: translation and the language of community in early Pennsylvania* examines part of the same region that Haefeli does. He picks up his story shortly after Haefeli leaves off, and concentrates on the German pietists and English Quakers who came to colonial Pennsylvania and professed enthusiasm for living in a polyglot society. Some pietists shared with some Quakers a belief that the world's multiplicity of languages was a legacy of the punishment that God had inflicted on humanity following the construction of the tower of Babel. Overcoming linguistic differences therefore represented for them 'an opportunity to participate in the history of salvation by helping to repair the linguistic and spiritual breach inflicted at Babel'.[13] Though direct lines of influence between Germans and English Quakers are difficult to document for the first two decades of Quakerism, the historical record becomes clearer following William Penn's continental European travels in the 1670s, and particularly after his recruitment of sympathetic Germans for Pennsylvania. Erben devotes most of his attention to Pennsylvania's Germans. One of his central projects is to make radical Protestant Germans 'central rather than marginal' figures 'in understanding early Pennsylvania society'.[14] He does this effectively, particularly in relation to the earliest years of the colony. He demonstrates that Germans pushed Penn and other supporters of Pennsylvania to elevate the value of toleration. For them, bringing settlers with diverse linguistic and religious backgrounds into the colony was not necessarily a

[13] Erben, *Harmony of the spirits*, p. 301.

[14] Ibid., p. 161.

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formula for disorder, but rather (perhaps paradoxically) a way to achieve a greater, more religiously significant harmony.

Of course, Pennsylvania's history did not end with its founding. Sectarian controversy soon engulfed the colony, and ironically its cause was not Penn's recruitment of non-Quakers, but divisions among the Quakers themselves. Erben discusses the ensuing 'Keithian controversy' from several perspectives including those of German-speaking observers, and pays particular attention to the response of Francis Daniel Pastorius, who in his manuscript compositions seemed to suggest that the discord stemmed from an overly rigid devotion to particular words. Placing translated texts in as many as seven languages side-by-side, Pastorius sought to demonstrate that the variety of expression hinted at something deeper, an underlying truth that could be expressed only incompletely or imperfectly in a single tongue. Erben is a literary scholar, and his attention is drawn more to written texts than to widespread social developments. As *A harmony of the spirits* moves forward through the eighteenth century, Erben's analysis increasingly centres on obscure documents, some of which, like David Zeisberger's enormous compilation of hymns in the Delaware language, may not have been widely read (in this case, perhaps not even among the converts in Zeisberger's mission). Texts like this, by themselves, cannot reveal the impact of the pietists' vision on the future of the United States.

But that is not Erben's purpose. He is not preoccupied with locating legacies. Like Haefeli, he insists that we should seek to understand historical actors on their own terms, and avoid the trap of simply looking for hints of nascent modern ideas in the religious discourse of the colonial era. Too many writers continue to do just that, particularly when addressing popular or undergraduate audiences, as evidenced by John M. Barry's *Roger Williams and the creation of the American soul: church, state, and the birth of liberty* and Peter Charles Hoffer's *When Benjamin Franklin met the Reverend Whitefield: Enlightenment, revival, and the power of the written word*.

Barry's *Roger Williams and the creation of the American soul* provides an engaging, detailed narrative of Williams' career for a popular audience. In 1636, Williams fled legal proceedings against him in puritan Massachusetts and established a settlement to the south on Narragansett Bay as a refuge for himself, his family, and other like-minded radical Protestants escaping the authorities in Boston. Other refugees soon joined him, along with some speculators, and a network of small villages grew to become Rhode Island. This was a diverse and fractious aggregation of colonists, and it was difficult to govern. Barry celebrates his protagonist's devotion to the project, his courage, inquisitiveness, and precocious insistence on protecting liberty of conscience. Seeking to explain how Williams's ideas developed, Barry details how he fled Anglican intolerance in England only to face puritan intolerance in America. Hard experience in Massachusetts led Williams to think about intolerance in general terms. One of the great strengths of Barry's account is that nearly half of it takes place in England. In the face of recurring opposition from Massachusetts and the other

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New England colonies, Williams could secure Rhode Island's future only by appealing back to London. Barry reminds us that Williams and his prominent puritan opponents in Massachusetts remained engaged with high English politics through the 1650s. Nonetheless, though Barry highlights the transatlantic dimension to his story, he ends by concluding that Williams 'was an American'.[15] He asserts that Williams experienced, and indeed helped create, the 'quintessentially American' tension between the puritans' aspiration to found 'a state committed to Christian ideals' and Williams's valorization of 'the individual standing alone with God, in glorious isolation'.[16] Barry assumes that the New Englanders' vision defined, and indeed still defines, 'the national consciousness of the United States'.[17]

Peter Charles Hoffer's *When Benjamin Franklin met the Reverend Whitefield* provides a brief, accessible narrative, intended for undergraduates, centred on the commercial and personal relationship between Benjamin Franklin and the evangelist George Whitefield. While not presenting a full biography of either man, Hoffer introduces them well, and uses their life stories to convey a great deal of information about the American colonies in the eighteenth century. He presents these men as both representative of their times and influential, and with breezy prose suggests that the trajectories of their careers anticipated historical trends that have continued into the twenty-first century. He compares Whitefield to modern America's televangelists, and describes Franklin in the following terms: 'Franklin's forward-looking versatility is strikingly modern. Blogger, bureaucrat, great writer, policy "wonk", electronic tinkerer, and media mogul all fit together in his remarkably innovative and inquisitive lifestyle.'[18] Hoffer emphasizes the partnership Franklin and Whitefield established, and argues that although the Enlightenment and the Great Awakening, the grand movements he associates with these two men, were superficially very different from one another, they both were part of a disruptive transatlantic exchange of ideas associated with the spread of print culture and more broadly with modernization. Hoffer describes the eighteenth century as a time 'when the Anglo-American empire was full of possibilities and opportunities for those with ambition and vision'.[19] He worries that the present generation has lost Franklin's and Whitefield's drive, optimism, generosity, and readiness to grant each other mutual respect. According to Hoffer, civility is rare today, as 'recurrent waves of culture wars, ethnic wars, and imperial wars … tear at our social and intellectual fabric'. Under these circumstances, 'perhaps our best course is to remind ourselves of the lessons of history, and of what Franklin and Whitefield taught us'.[20] Hoffer has an easier time endorsing the lessons that Franklin might have taught. His account of Whitefield's religious message verges at times toward avowed incomprehension, for example when he declares that Calvinism was logically inconsistent with a message

[15] Barry, *Roger Williams*, p. 387.
[16] Ibid., p. 346.
[17] Ibid., p. 81.
[18] Hoffer, *Benjamin Franklin*, p. 122.
[19] Ibid., p. 7.
[20] Ibid., p. 131.

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of hope.[21] What matters for Hoffer is that Whitefield's revivals seem inclusive in a way that foreshadows American democracy. Before the revivals, according to Hoffer, women attended religious ceremonies 'because their fathers or husbands brought them. Servants and children came because their masters and parents commanded them. Not so the crowds around Whitefield. They came because they wanted to, and no one could stop them (though some tried).'[22] According to Hoffer's account, when Whitefield preached nearly all social distinctions and hierarchical pressures melted away.

Like Barry's treatment of Williams, Hoffer's discussion of Franklin and Whitefield reveals the limitations of the old 'great man' approach to history. The eighteenth century was not a period of great opportunity for everyone with ambition and vision. Hoffer mentions slavery only as a social issue that both Franklin and Whitefield fudged. Though Hoffer certainly does not endorse Franklin's view of Indians, the most vivid depiction of them in his book comes from Franklin, as paraphrased by the historian James Merrell, describing the Indians' ' "dark colored bodies, half naked, seen only by the gloomy light of the Bonfire", and their "terrible shriek and halloo", which seemed to him "formed a scene the most resembling our ideas of hell that could be imagined" '.[23] Barry describes the Quakers of Rhode Island with only slightly more comprehension or sympathy.[24] Historical writing of this kind brings to mind the distinction Haefeli and others draw between tolerating and being tolerated. Invoking 'our' values and challenges in the twenty first century, Barry and Hoffer assume that they and their readers belong to a community shaped by legacies left by their favourite great men. Southerners, blacks, Indians, Catholics, Jews, Quakers, and an enormous array of others are presumably part of that community today, but they did not create the society they belong to. The credit goes to those who wielded power in New England and Pennsylvania in the colonial period. In addition to marginalizing most of the population of early America, celebrating such leaders also runs the risk of obscuring how toleration operated in practice. Barry, in particular, endorses Williams's call for maintaining a 'hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world', and he associates that idea with the present-day notion that we should separate church from state.[25] But Barry makes no effort to determine where in practice that 'hedge or wall' might have been constructed in the colonial period, or indeed where it should be today. Much of the controversy surrounding religious liberty in early America hinged on defining exactly which spheres of life were religious.

It is much more difficult to draw a clear line between secular and religious affairs if we follow the example of Mark Valeri and study religion as

[21] Ibid., p. 69.
[22] Ibid., p. 90.
[23] Ibid., p. 81, quoting James Merrell, *Into the American woods: negotiations on the Pennsylvania frontier* (New York, NY, 2000), p. 258.
[24] See Barry, *Roger Williams*, pp. 366–9.
[25] Ibid., pp. 307–8.

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a 'cultural system – a complex of ideas, family practices, ritual, and communal expectations rather than merely a logic of doctrines set against social forces'.[26] Valeri's *Heavenly merchandize: how religion shaped commerce in puritan America* is an ambitious and impressive work, correcting assumptions about New England's development that have persisted since the days of Max Weber. Valeri charts the arduous, decades-long process through which puritan and Congregationalist ministers, along with the 'soulful merchants' in their congregations, abandoned customary and biblically based strictures against competitive economic activity, and eventually began to espouse the idea that 'God had made the laws of commerce; they were instruments of providence'.[27] Weber, like Miller after him, interpreted this transformation as a decline in religiosity, but Valeri argues to the contrary that the churches' endorsement of market economics grew out of a debate among fervent Christians, with the economic liberals just as devout as the old guard had been. As Valeri shows, the embrace of the liberal market entailed a change in New England Protestantism itself, not only ideologically but also institutionally, as churches stopped using their own disciplinary mechanisms to regulate their members' economic activities, and instead endorsed government regulation, litigation and prosecution, indeed often imbuing formal legal procedures with religious significance. As New England's churches embraced the market and its regulatory mechanisms, they increasingly identified themselves with an empire that included acceptably righteous Anglicans, Baptists, and Presbyterians. By the mid-eighteenth century, according to most New Englanders' understanding of contemporary events, providence and the market favoured the entire Protestant British empire. God sided with them all.

It was impossible to obey the old church-regulated system of economic exchange in interactions with those who embraced the liberalized market. For the local economy to function, one side or the other had to win. This was not a simple battle between generations or sects, however. As Valeri demonstrates in detail, the transformation of New England's economy involved and affected everyone in the colonies simultaneously, and it disturbed all of the religiously inclined. Some of the most revealing debates were internal ones, recorded in private notes, diaries, and account books. Perhaps inevitably, since he is intervening in a debate that has lasted over a century, Valeri's frame of reference seems somewhat dated. Though the Puritans and Congregationalists he studies were only a subset of New Englanders, he assumes without much discussion that they shaped the rest of American culture, that the choices they made in the colonial period established the 'remarkable alliance between Protestantism and commerce in America'.[28] The essays in *The first prejudice* bring all of the colonies into the narrative. Across British North America, there were parallel transformations, encouraging toleration among Protestants, and transferring moral and regulatory authority from the churches to the civil

[26] Valeri, *Heavenly merchandize*, p. 6. [27] Ibid., p. 233. [28] Ibid., p. 10.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X1400003X Published online by Cambridge University Press

institutions of government. Those changes never entailed a neat separation of religious and political life.

Working on an imperial scale, Owen Stanwood examines the political importance of anti-Catholicism from the founding of the colonies through the Revolution. Stanwood reminds us that European colonization in North America began in Florida and Carolina with violent religiously-informed clashes between French Protestant colonists and Spanish Catholic soldiers. From that time forward, though religion was hardly the only source of dispute between the rival empires on the continent, anti-Catholicism helped inspire English Protestant colonization efforts, and in the minds of the colonists, helped explain England's imperial rivalries with both Spain and France. Across the ocean, antipopery was central to English politics, inspiring campaigns against Catholics in the line of succession and at court, and informing the critiques that rival Protestants hurled at one another. The Glorious Revolution radically altered the political implications of anti-Catholicism, but hardly diminished its importance. After 1688, anti-Catholicism was a consensus position among those governing the empire. This situation helped ease relations between Protestant groups, and in America fostered a growth of religious diversity for Protestants, not only because of new laws mandating toleration, but equally importantly because colonial America became a refuge for several large Protestant groups fleeing persecution on the continent of Europe. Stanwood rightly observes that colonial discussions of Indian wars and slave rebellions became increasingly inflected by anti-Catholicism in the later colonial period. There were concrete reasons for this, since France became more openly supportive of Native American military action against the New England colonies after 1675, and Catholic missionaries became more important players in the geopolitics of South Carolina and Florida in the late seventeenth century. Stanwood opens his essay with a brief account of the Americans' unsuccessful effort to rally French Canadians to the Patriot cause in 1775. Remembering New England's long history of campaigns against French-speaking Catholics, the Quebecois unsurprisingly preferred the British, who had adopted a more tolerant stance toward them – in a major shift in policy – in 1763. The Patriots were repulsed, and Canada remained British. Of course, religion does not explain everything, but to this day one might view the US–Canadian border as a monument to early American anti-Catholicism.[29]

Quaker Pennsylvania is often cited as an exceptionally tolerant colony, but ironically, as Andrew R. Murphy indicates, of all the colonists in British North America, the Pennsylvania Quakers were the least inclined to separate political from religious affairs. As the Quaker reformer Anthony Benezet put it, 'There is no distinction in Christianity between civil and

[29] Owen Stanwood, 'Catholics, Protestants, and the clash of civilizations in early America', in Beneke and Grenda, eds., *The first prejudice*, pp. 218–40.

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religious matters.'[30] This conviction inspired leading Quaker pacifists during the Seven Years War to declare that any government mandate requiring them to compromise their religious principles, for example by supporting military action against the French, violated their religious liberty. In part to protect this liberty as they understood it, Quakers dominated the Pennsylvania Assembly from the founding of the colony into the 1750s, though by the end of that period their position was becoming tenuous. Their political opponents considered their stance preposterous, and some within the Quaker Meetings agreed that they were aggrandizing themselves and endangering their colony by adopting such a broad and apparently self-serving definition of religious liberty. As Murphy demonstrates, the debates of the 1750s continued a controversy that dated back at least to the 1690s when George Keith was prosecuted for 'reviling civil magistrates' in Pennsylvania. In contrast to the Massachusetts Puritans who kept their religious ministers out of the General Court, Pennsylvania's legislature had prominent Quaker ministers in leadership roles, and thus when Keith criticized them, even though he did so in religious terms, he made himself criminally liable for attacking the government. In colonial Pennsylvania, religious controversies and political ones were often indistinguishable.[31]

The Quakers gave up their dominant position within the Pennsylvania Assembly in the late 1750s. Their withdrawal fitted within a general American trend toward maintaining a clearer distinction between ecclesiastical and political authority. Antagonisms between religious groups drove this process forward, and it was not an easy transition for the Quakers, or for other groups like the Anglicans, who similarly had to scale back their ambitions in order to co-exist with other churches in colonial America. As Ned Landsman shows in his chapter in *The first prejudice*, at the beginning of the eighteenth century the Church of England was engaged in widespread efforts to assert its primacy in the colonies. According to Landsman, these campaigns were disrupted by the British Act (or Treaty) of Union in 1707, which had an unexpected, destabilizing effect on the status of Britain's churches in North America. The union did not fully unify Britain in religious terms, but instead resulted in England and Scotland maintaining separate national churches, one Anglican and the other Presbyterian, with both nations maintaining a general policy of toleration. Almost immediately after the union was sealed, a series of debates erupted within the colonies over whether this arrangement undermined the pretensions of the Church of England in North America. Some claimed that after 1707 the empire had two co-equal established churches, one English and one Scottish, while others claimed that the union had established a new precedent for imperial governance suggesting that each colony, like the several

[30] Anthony Benezet to John Smith, 13 Dec. 1757, in George S. Brookes, ed., *Friend Anthony Benezet* (Philadelphia, PA, 1937), p. 225.

[31] Andrew R. Murphy, 'Persecuting Quakers? Liberty and toleration in early Pennsylvania', in Beneke and Grenda, eds., *The first prejudice*, pp. 143–65.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X1400003X Published online by Cambridge University Press

nations of Britain, should erect its own establishment. Others eventually insisted that the colonies could no longer have any established churches, that all denominations were equal. In the short term, these debates helped derail Anglican efforts to have a bishop appointed for the colonies. In the longer term, an important consequence of these discussions was that long-standing arguments over the toleration of religious dissent expanded to incorporate a debate over the legal privileges claimed by particular denominations. Though disestablishment was not universally embraced until the nineteenth century, by the time of the revolution it had become a peculiarly American cause.[32]

Before the Church of England in America could accept equality among denominations, it had to reconsider some of its core functions. Throughout the colonial period, for a variety of spiritual and practical reasons, many American Anglicans passionately believed that they needed a bishop, but non-Anglicans feared Episcopalian domination, and in the effort to ease those worries, some prominent members of the church – most notably Thomas Bradbury Chandler in 1767 – 'disavowed any secular authority for bishops through ecclesiastical courts', and were ready to deny their bishops 'any authority at all over non-Anglicans'. Partly because Scottish Episcopalians in the colonies were wary of granting power to English bishops, Chandler also signalled that he was willing to see bishops appointed with 'disciplinary powers over no one other than the clergy'.[33] These were enormous concessions, but they were not enough to placate those outside the church who successfully resisted the appointment of any Anglican bishops in the colonial period. It was only after the imperial bonds were broken that non-Episcopalian Americans, as a group, were willing to allow bishops in their midst.

While many colonists feared ecclesiastical authority, they were less likely to resist granting civil magistrates the power to prosecute men and women for what Susan Juster calls 'crimes against God'. In an essay covering most of the colonies, Juster tracks prosecutions for Sabbath-breaking, heresy, blasphemy, contempt of church, slander of church officials, and abuse of church property. She finds such prosecutions were 'an occasional, rather than regular feature of the colonial court system', but they occurred nearly everywhere, and in colonies such as Maryland the trend seems to have been toward more, rather than less, enforcement.[34] These prosecutions reflected a widespread, persistent belief that corporate godliness was an essential component of social order. In colonies like Maryland with a diverse array of Christians, the criminal code established a set of minimal requirements designed to allow neighbours to live together without giving each other offence or egregiously offending God. Similar

[32] Ned Landsman, 'The episcopate, the British Union, and the failure of religious settlement in colonial British America', in Beneke and Grenda, eds., *The first prejudice*, pp. 75–97.

[33] Ibid., p. 89.

[34] Susan Juster, 'Heretics, blasphemers, and Sabbath-breakers: the prosecution of religious crime in early America', in Beneke and Grenda, eds., *The first prejudice*, pp. 123–42, at p. 124.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X1400003X Published online by Cambridge University Press

concerns animated Americans in the post-revolutionary era. Christopher Grasso argues that legal toleration of diverse religious groups coincided with growing hostility, and legal discrimination, against deists, free thinkers, and atheists. The new legal and cultural order emphasizing equal rights and a measure of co-operation between Christian denominations offered less protection to those who did not accept Christianity. In many states, those who refused to acknowledge a supreme being who punished sin were banned from testifying in court. On occasion free thinkers were prosecuted for blasphemy.[35] Similarly, even after the Revolution, Jews in some states could be prosecuted for failing to respect the Christian Sabbath.

There were only perhaps 2,500 Jews in colonial America at the outbreak of the Revolution, but their history has generated a considerable body of scholarship. The Jews are particularly intriguing for historians of American intolerance and toleration because their presence in early America generated a great deal of commentary and apparently contradictory responses. William Pencak's discussion of anti-Semitism in early America emphasizes the importance of social class. Pencak demonstrates that toleration was more common among elites, and that gentile appreciation of Judaism, or Philo-Semitism, was primarily an elite phenomenon. Class divisions helped make the adoption of official policies of toleration a mixed blessing for Jews after the Revolution. Even though Jews were a tiny minority in the early republic, their ability to participate in politics gave rise to conspiracy theories and the partisan deployment of anti-Semitic rhetoric, especially during the late 1790s and the election campaign of 1800. Pencak also notes that early national anti-Semitism often had an important racial dimension, and that Jewish converts to Christianity, despite their devotion to their new faith, could still be subject to anti-Semitic attacks.[36]

Michael Hoberman's *New Israel/New England: Jews and puritans in early America* traces some of the most important sources of Protestant America's ambivalence toward Jews. Even before they met any actual Jews, puritans in New England compared themselves to the ancient Israelites and their descendants. The Israelites of the Old Testament were sometimes a model for New Englanders, for example when the puritan colonies drafted their early legal codes. On other occasions, however, the word 'Jew' was used as a slur, as when Ann Hutchinson used the label in an effort to shame the legalistically minded puritan magistrates who banished her from Massachusetts. Virtually all the articulate colonists in New England agreed that Judaism was embedded in their history, and many also believed that Jews would figure prominently in their future, because the conversion of the Jews (or perhaps the Indians – were they a lost tribe of Israel?)

[35] Christopher Grasso, 'The boundaries of toleration and tolerance: religious infidelity in the early American republic', in Beneke and Grenda, eds., *The first prejudice*, pp. 286–302.

[36] William Pencack, 'Antisemitism, toleration, and appreciation: the changing relations of Jews and gentiles in early America', in Beneke and Grenda, eds., *The first prejudice*, pp. 241–62.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X1400003X Published online by Cambridge University Press

was supposed to be a sign of the millennium. Hoberman examines the interplay between these abstract, imaginary, sometimes fantastical notions and face-to-face interactions between Protestant New Englanders and Jews. Given New England's small Jewish population, Hoberman has a limited number of case-studies to work with, and exploiting the diaries, pamphlets, and sermons of prolific puritan writers like Samuel Sewall, the Mathers, and Ezra Stiles, he examines each of his cases in detail. The specificity of each case complicates any effort to identify general trends, but Hoberman presents a convincing, if not too surprising, argument that New England became gradually more receptive of Jews, and tolerant of a visible Jewish presence, over the course of the colonial period. He attributes this shift to Anglicization, the growth of commerce, and pragmatism, in other words, a reordering of the settlers' priorities away from puritanism toward what Hoberman calls modernization. The War of American Independence interrupted the trend, as several of Newport's prominent Jews were suspected of loyalism, and conspiracy theories circulated implicating the colonies' Jews in general. A large part of Rhode Island's Jewish population fled, but after the war, according to Hoberman, progress resumed. Though Pencack reminds us that the Jews' status in America remained contested and sometimes difficult, throughout the United States Jews eventually benefited from constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, guarantees that were enacted with groups other than Jews in mind.

While the puritan New Englanders were fascinated by Jews, they were even more interested in Native Americans. Their commentary on Indians, their formal negotiations with them, and their daily interactions with the Native peoples of their region generated a huge body of historical evidence revealing an array of conflicting impulses ranging from a desire to convert the Indians and thereby usher in the millennium to a wish to wipe them from the face of the earth. In part because its early leaders were so articulate and its archives remain so rich, New England holds a prominent place in scholarship on early modern Protestantism's impact on Native American history. Though it is important not to overstate the case, developments in New England prefigured and influenced later events across the United States.

Using the precise tools of local social history refined a generation ago by scholars studying New England towns, Linford D. Fisher, in *The Indian Great Awakening: religion and the shaping of Native cultures in early America*, provides a comprehensive survey of Native American engagement with Christianity in southern New England from the early eighteenth century through the early nineteenth. He vividly demonstrates how many Indians in Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Long Island shifted their spiritual practices in response to circumstances. Accused of worshipping the devil in the 1730s, an elderly shaman among the Narragansetts replied that an 'Evil power' had caused a draught and damaged the corn crop, and therefore that power deserved the Indians' reverent attention. 'If I was to beat you, who would you pray to? … to me, or to your Father Ten miles off? You would pray to me to leave off and not

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X1400003X Published online by Cambridge University Press

beat you anymore: so we pray to the Devil to leave off affecting us with Evil.'[37] Citing evidence such as this, Fisher argues that 'interior processes [of religious experience] never occur in a vacuum, and the broader social and cultural contexts cannot be neglected, especially in colonial situations marked by an obvious imbalance of power'. Partly as a consequence, among Indians in the colonial period, the adoption of Christianity 'usually defied the more totalizing and complete notions that often frame the word "conversion" '.[38] 'Native Americans did not separate out something called "religion" … The world Indians inhabited was full of spiritual forces and meaning that shaped lives, events, and rituals. Daily life – cooking, eating, hunting, singing – could potentially be infused with spiritual significance.'[39] Fisher opens each of his chapters with a lively, suggestive anecdote giving glimpses into the lives of Indians that will surprise any readers who retain the old misimpression that documents are scarce for the study of Native American history. His work supplements and gently corrects the large body of scholarly literature which concentrates on forced migrations westward, inadvertently reinforcing the white New Englanders' long-standing, convenient assumption that by the early nineteenth century their region's local Indians were gone. Most of New England's Indians stayed where they were. As Fisher describes them they were not particularly heroic, nor were their lives marked by constant tragedy. One of their recurring objectives in adopting Christian institutions and practices was to secure schooling and literacy for themselves and their children.

Fisher demonstrates that southern New England's Indians began to respond positively to missionary efforts before the revivals of the Great Awakening. The Awakening drew an unprecedented number of Indians into churches, but the majority stayed away and a large number of the apparent conversions from the revivals were only temporary. The most important shift came when Christian Indians began to form their own churches away from the supervision of white missionaries. These churches became centres of community life, and demonstrated that it was possible to be Christian and Indian at the same time. That, in a nutshell, is Fisher's conclusion. It does not provide a particularly startling or gripping end to his narrative, and his chronologically organized book trails off in its final chapter and epilogue. Fisher's work illustrates both the value and the limitations of social history. *The Indian Great Awakening* leaves the reader wanting to know more about the Indians' souls.

In part because it concentrates more on the problem of intolerance, David J. Silverman's *Red brethren: the Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians and the problem of race in early America* has more bite. Silverman tells the story of two communities of Christian Indians from the region of New England and New York from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth. He concentrates most on the Indians who moved to Brothertown, a mission settlement in New York,

[37] Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening*, p. 18.
[38] Ibid., p. 8.
[39] Ibid., p. 16.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X1400003X Published online by Cambridge University Press

in the 1780s. There, they faced harassment and piecemeal dispossession, and eventually moved further west to Wisconsin where they suffered a similar fate. The Brothertown story is dramatic in large part because of the documentation left behind by Samson Occom, a Mohegan man who converted to Protestant Christianity during the Great Awakening and eventually became an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church. In the 1760s, Occom served the Scottish Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge working as 'minister at large to the Indians', and he recruited converts for Christianity among the Oneidas and other nearby tribes from a base near the future site of Brothertown. He also, collaborating with the white missionary Eleazar Wheelock, raised money for the creation of Dartmouth College in the expectation that it would function as a training centre for religiously inspired Indians. Occom spent more than two years in Britain soliciting donations for this project, and though he was successful raising money, he also received a considerable amount of abuse, and this experience darkened his outlook. He became increasingly pessimistic about the prospect of co-operation between white Christians and Indians, and his anger increased after Dartmouth was established, only to become a school for colonists rather than Indians. Occom felt exploited, and thoroughly disrespected, and he concluded that Wheelock, in particular, was 'a boldfaced hypocrite no better than the English society that had produced him'.[40] Though he always remained a Christian, Occom began to adopt some of the beliefs we now associate with nativist, Native American prophets. By the time he helped establish Brothertown, he divided humanity along racial lines, and believed that Indians would lead better Christian lives apart from whites. After the Brothertown community began to fracture and erode in the face of white encroachments, he concluded tragically that God had specially cursed the Indians for their ancestral sins. His pessimism was justified, even if his explanation for the course of events may not have been. The story Silverman tells is not a happy one.

The charge of hypocrisy animates *Red brethren*. Silverman amply demonstrates that many Christian Indians in this period dismissed white Christians as hypocrites, but he also makes it clear that he shares this assessment, at least with regard to the many missionaries whose evangelical efforts served to facilitate Indian removal and the confiscation of tribal lands. If we accept the advice of Jesus, 'Ye shall know them by their fruits', and consider the suffering inflicted on the Brothertown Indians, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the white missionaries' profession of Christianity was a sham, and that the core of their character was defined less by their religion than by their communal racism, arrogance, and greed. Silverman's analytical perspective brings life to an important facet of Native American experience, but this comes at a cost. As a frame of analysis, hypocrisy sheds very little light on how the white missionaries understood their own behaviour or justified their actions to themselves.

[40] Silverman, *Red brethren*, p. 70.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X1400003X Published online by Cambridge University Press

There are other instructive ways to examine the relationship between Christianity and racism. Whereas Silverman perceives a contradiction between the two, Rebecca Anne Goetz, in *The baptism of early Virginia: how Christianity created race*, maintains that racial hierarchy was intrinsic within early American understandings of Christianity. Goetz argues, in general terms, that the promoters, leaders, and white settlers of Virginia initially believed that Christianity could and should be spread to 'heathen' nations including Native Americans and Africans, but by the late 1660s white Virginians had adopted a dramatically different way of using and understanding the word 'Christian', in effect equating the term with 'white'. When discussing servants, for example, the statute-writers of Virginia used the word 'Christian' to mean non-slave and non-Indian. Old English habits of thought, reinforced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries during conflicts with Muslims along the North African coast, suggested that 'Christians' could not legally be enslaved. This begged the question of whether people already enslaved could retain that status after conversion to Christianity. Goetz traces the long controversy, familiar to historians of early Virginia, over whether baptism conferred freedom to slaves. As early as 1667, the House of Burgesses passed a law declaring that it did not, but slaveholders were uncertain of the validity of that statute, and at least until the 1730s there was no large-scale effort to teach Christianity to slaves.

In her most original chapter, Goetz focuses on controversies surrounding the sacrament of baptism in Virginia. The vast majority of those who professed Christianity assumed that baptism was the essential rite of entry into the Christian fold. This belief called into question the status of some Protestants, including the young children of the Baptists and all the Quakers, but as Goetz compellingly shows, there was a particularly revealing debate concerning the baptism of slaves. The 1667 statute ostensibly promoted baptizing slaves, but at least with reference to adults, the Burgesses suggested that slaves should be baptized only 'if capable to be admitted to that sacrament'.[41] Among slaveholders, this led to doubtful, cynical inquiries into the intellectual and spiritual capacities of slaves. Eventually, people who baptized squealing infants argued that adult African Americans were unready to receive the sacrament. Goetz concludes from such evidence that white Virginians had come to a broad conclusion that people of African descent and Indians were 'incapable' of being Christian.[42]

Perhaps many Virginians came to this conclusion, but throughout the long period that Goetz discusses there were some whites who simply disagreed, and others who took the more complicated position that Christianity might be found among Indians and African Americans, but only rarely. There may have been a trend toward the hardening of racial categories, but the debates Goetz discusses were older and more persistent than she acknowledges. Goetz deploys the term 'hereditary heathenism' (a phrase she attributes to a colleague from

[41] Goetz, *Baptism of early Virginia*, p. 105.

[42] Ibid., p. 85.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X1400003X Published online by Cambridge University Press

her graduate school days) to describe the status white Virginians ascribed to Indians and blacks.[43] She suggests that Anglo-Americans invented the category of the 'hereditary heathen' in Virginia. But concerns about lingering, deep-rooted paganism had suffused English commentary on the Welsh and Irish since the middle ages, and scepticism about the validity of Celtic Christianity persisted well into the eighteenth century. 'Hereditary heathenism', if we want to call it that, was neither a new idea nor peculiarly American.

The chronology of the intellectual shifts Goetz identifies are difficult to pin down. She concentrates primarily on tracing seventeenth-century transformations, but she identifies an equally important transfer of ideas in the eighteenth century in connection with the association between Christianity and freedom. By the 1740s, slaveholders were confident that Christians could be slaves, but among black Christians, the Bible seemed to tell a story of worldly as well as spiritual liberation. Goetz hints at a continuity between the debates of the seventeenth century, when whites worried that baptism might make slaves free, and the assertions of some black preachers in the eighteenth century and beyond that salvation meant freedom. One implication of these declarations was that in practical terms, religious status affected every aspect of an African American's life. Since this was, at various times, a widely held assumption, it should not surprise us that African Americans used the language of religion, and Christianity specifically, to discuss labour, race relations, family life, politics, and the full range of social interactions. This may not have been true of everyone of African descent in eighteenth-century America, but it was certainly true of the most prominent of them, such as Phillis Wheatley.

Surprisingly, given the scholarly attention Wheatley has received over the past several decades, Vincent Carretta's *Phillis Wheatley: biography of a genius in bondage* is her first full-length biography. Wheatley was enslaved in Africa in 1761 at the age of seven or thereabouts. She was carried to Boston, where she was purchased by Susanna and John Wheatley, who raised her to be a Christian and gave her an expansive education. Phillis Wheatley became perhaps the most famous poet in late colonial British North America, and as Carretta demonstrates, her poems provide unique commentary on the momentous events of the 1770s. She attracted attention from many of the most prominent leaders of her time, including Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson, the abolitionists Granville Sharp, Ignatius Sancho, and John Wesley, and the Mohawk Christian minister Samson Occum. Whether she liked it or not, she became an important figure in revolutionary-era debates over race, because the sophistication of her poetry defied the widespread prejudices of her age.

Wheatley was a patriot, and she wrote effusive poems in praise of the leaders and soldiers of the American Revolution. She was also a professed Christian, and in her writings and religious practice she expressed her devotion to a

[43] Ibid., p. ix.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X1400003X Published online by Cambridge University Press

religious vision that transcended racial divisions. She sought to educate, inspire, and convert whites, not only through her published work but in interactions with individuals like Thomas Wallcut, a young boy who corresponded with Wheatley from Dartmouth College. Susanna and Phillis Wheatley also corresponded with Occom over many years. Their complex three-way relationship is not the focus of Carretta's attention, but the two women's multi-layered interactions with Occom serve to remind us how much we miss if we seek to understand him only as an 'Indian' leader. We would similarly diminish Wheatley if we viewed her only as a slave pursuing freedom. Indeed, as Carretta shows, in Wheatley's case we cannot begin to understand her engagement with the slavery issue unless we grapple with her peculiar religious perspective.

In her poem *On being brought from Africa to America*, Wheatley proclaimed, ''Twas mercy brought me from my *Pagan* land,/Taught my benighted soul to understand,/That there's a God, that there's a *Saviour* too:/Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.'[44] This poem remains controversial. Wheatley's assessment of slavery seems uncomfortably similar to the defensive arguments of American slaveholders who insisted that enslavement benefited Africans. Carretta amply demonstrates, however, that in the full body of her work Wheatley advocated equality, 'subtly and indirectly' confronting 'racism, sexism and slavery'.[45] The story Wheatley tells in *On being brought from Africa to America* is a religiously inspired, redemptive one. It is the story of the 'fortunate fall', in which sin leads to salvation. The sin, in the poem, is not Wheatley's personal transgression, but a set of societal ills, and the ultimate promise of salvation, Carretta argues, is not for Wheatley alone but for all humanity. She wants the world to embrace Christianity, and one result of that, surely, would be an end to slavery.

Alas, Wheatley may have been too optimistic. The happy future she imagined presupposed a consensus on the ethical demands of Christianity. But the long history of Christianity has been marked by nearly constant dissension, and in the American context self-consciously 'Christian' positions have been taken by proponents of nearly every possible stance in nearly every major American controversy including those surrounding racism and slavery. It may be, as Amanda Porterfield argues in *Conceived in doubt: religion and politics in the new American nation*, that Christianity's impact on American political life is most clearly evident not in any policy outcome, but in the development of an unusually intolerant style of debate.

Porterfield takes issue with Nathan Hatch's suggestion that the early republic witnessed the 'democratization of American Christianity'.[46] On the contrary, she suggests that religion served to make Americans irrational, complacent, and intolerant. Christianity celebrated the monarchical order of the Kingdom of

[44] Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, p. 60.
[45] Ibid., p. 202.
[46] Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X1400003X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Heaven, and in the early republic this vision was widely used to justify the maintenance of a range of social hierarchies that had been briefly challenged in the revolutionary era, including chattel slavery and the disfranchisement of women. Porterfield suggests that the Revolution initially encouraged Americans across a wide social spectrum to challenge old conventions and view the world, comprehensively, with a healthy dose of scepticism. Thomas Paine was the embodiment of this spirit, and in the 1790s, following his publication of *The age of reason*, he became the target of religious reactionaries who eventually succeeded in shaping an American political discourse that closely associated religious doubt with disorder, degeneracy, snobbery, and treason.

Thomas Jefferson plays a pivotal role in Porterfield's story. His approach to religion was similar to Paine's, and in *Notes on the state of Virginia* he argued for a kind of toleration that left a place in society for thorough-going sceptics. 'It does me no injury', Jefferson wrote, 'for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods or no gods. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.'[47] Jefferson's Federalist opponents turned these words against him, and in the 1790s the violence of the French Revolution strengthened their convictions. Timothy Dwight spoke for many when he warned that unless Christians maintained control of society, 'our churches may become temples of reason', and 'we may change our holy worship into a dance of Jacobin frenzy'.[48] In the ensuing controversy Jefferson found allies among America's Baptists. As Porterfield points out, liberal rationalists and Baptists had been politically allied since the mid-seventeenth century in opposing state control over religious life. The Baptists were better equipped than the rationalists, though, to respond to any accusation that they were irreligious, and indeed Baptists and other religiously inclined supporters of Jefferson's Republican Party questioned the religious faith of the Federalists. Eventually scepticism was denounced by the most vocal partisans on both sides of America's nascent political divide.

Porterfield identifies an epic transformation in the role of religion in American life between the 1790s and the War of 1812. Throughout this period, there were some like Jefferson who remained religiously sceptical. In general, however, the sceptics capitulated by entering into coalitions with the religiously minded and scoring points against their opponents by challenging the depth of their convictions. Whatever tensions remained among the Jeffersonian Republicans, they were eased by the outbreak of the War of 1812. In the lead-up to that conflict, 'appeals to national honor operated as a substitute for religious unity, bridging the gap between materialists like [Henry] Clay and evangelical Baptists and Methodists upon whom Republicans counted for votes'.[49] Porterfield begins her book with Paine and ends with Clay, who, she argues, denounced the opponents of the War of 1812 with the same kind of righteous fervour that had previously been used to denigrate religious sceptics. Clay was not a conventionally religious man, but he made wartime patriotism a test of

[47] Porterfield, *Conceived in doubt*, p. 33. [48] Ibid., p. 92. [49] Ibid., p. 177.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X1400003X Published online by Cambridge University Press

faith. Porterfield makes her argument forcefully, almost angrily, and she recognizes the contemporary resonance of her claims. She suggests that Americans are still afflicted by a closed-mindedness equating doubt with the lack of any conviction. As Porterfield suggests, 'the highly effective presidential campaign slogan, "Yes we can", begged the question of confidence and trust in America by answering it. This national practice of defending against doubt, even before its existence can be acknowledged, memorializes an approach to religion and politics established in the early republic.'[50]

Implicitly or explicitly, all historians of religious toleration and intolerance in early America acknowledge the timeliness of their topic. At the same time, however, the most sophisticated work serves as a warning against drawing simple, instrumentalist lessons from the past. The tangled interplay of religion and politics in British North America and the early United States planted a thicket from which Americans have not yet fully escaped. For this reason alone, looking forward we can expect a continuing flow of engaged, passionate, and careful scholarship on relations between religious groups in early America.

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[50] Ibid., p. 207.

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