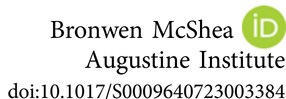
while maintaining a responsible and critical scholarly voice throughout. Dunn should be thanked for her labors and generosity in offering this book to us.

Bronwen McShea 
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The Old Faith in a New Nation: American Protestants and the Christian Past. By **Paul J. Gutacker**. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. x + 247 pp. $29.95 paper.

Since the Founding Era (1775–1789), Americans have waffled between conceptions of their nation based either on novelty or tradition. The dollar bill, for instance, boasts of America as a *novus ordo seculorum*. Juxtaposed to this is a George Washington or Thomas Jefferson invoking the Roman republic's ideal of the yeoman farmer who could serve his country as a soldier; Jefferson was a self-conscious agrarian (on the order of Cato), while Washington's greatest admirers remembered him as Cincinnatus (the Roman patrician statesman who came to Rome's rescue only to resign his commission once the military crisis was over). Similar discrepancies emerge in antebellum America where Protestant denominational colleges, founded almost as fast as Americans settled the frontier, used a classical curriculum even as the likes of Ralph Waldo Emerson or advocates of Manifest Destiny told Americans to cut their ties to Europe in order to develop a national literature. Even the Free Will Baptists who founded Hillsdale College (1844) took the novel step of admitting women and blacks (sometimes into non-degree programs) while using a curriculum, heavily weighted toward Greek and Latin, that followed the best colleges in the East.

It turns out, thanks to Paul J. Gutacker's new book, that American Protestants (primarily what historians have come to call *evangelical*) were also double-minded about the past and the present. As much as low church and revival-friendly Protestants adopted practices and employed arguments that seemed to repudiate the Christian past, they were, as the author argues, deeply attentive to historical precedent. This interest was not simply a form of primitivism—looking to the apostles and early church as the time of a Christian faith untainted by bishops and emperors. American Protestants also appealed to Christian and secular history, often mediated through authors such as Johann Lorenz von Mosheim (*Ecclesiastical History*), David Hume (*History of England*), William Robertson (*History of Scotland* and *Charles V*), Edward Gibbon (*History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*), and Joseph Priestly (*History of the Corruptions of Christianity*). Gutacker covers Protestants running from Unitarians to Disciples of Christ, and includes Roman Catholic sources at times. This means that *Old Faith in a New Nation* is not simply a rejoinder to the sort of biblicism, anti-clericalism, and anti-traditionalism that Nathan O. Hatch documented in *The Democratization of American Christianity* (1989). Gutacker does not claim that low-church Protestants thought of themselves as firmly rooted in tradition. What he does show, quite effectively at that, is the numerous ways that American Protestants, despite being stripped of the institutional trappings (churchly

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and civil) available to their European peers, employed history to discern God's will for nineteenth-century Americans.

The book begins with a mainly general description of Protestant historical awareness. In particular, Gutacker shows the way American Christians used historical narratives to justify distinctly American arrangements like the separation of church and state. Here the past showed the sorts of corruption that followed from mingling civil and church powers. But appeals to church history could also assist ecclesiastical or theological convictions such as when defenders of infant baptism argued that this practice was widespread in the early church. Baptists, of course, countered with their own appeals to antiquity. Another part of the Protestant appropriation of the past was, as Gutacker well documents, to show the errors and dangers of Roman Catholicism. For apologists, the corrections rendered by the Reformation were one more instance of history confirming the present. Gutacker may not use his evidence to warn about the dangers of presentism —namely, reading one's own ideals and time back into the past. His book is in many respects chock full of such historical appropriations. Only with the emergence of professional academic history in the final decades of the nineteenth century did inquiry into the past demand a stance (ideally) of detachment. For that reason, when women scoured the past for examples of equality or when African Americans also employed historical examples to oppose American slavery, neither group was doing anything different from the rest of American Christians who found in the past a reservoir of justifications for contemporary convictions.

Even if examples of appeals to historical precedents are relatively easy to find (though Gutacker is right to argue that scholars have not featured this trait among American Protestants), the most telling debates came from the Civil War era. "From the 1830s through the Civil War," he writes, "Christians across various Protestant denominations readily drew on patristic and medieval theology, argued about precedent, and even insisted on the importance of tradition" (142). They did so, moreover, without self-awareness or irony. As Gutacker observes, Roman Catholics ignored papal decrees, Episcopalians "celebrated" colonial Puritans, Presbyterians "defended medieval society," and even Baptists treated "patristic exegesis as authoritative" (142). American Christians could find almost anything they wanted in history. As comical as these examples might appear, Gutacker uses them to make an important point. For all of the emphasis on biblicism as a defining trait of American Protestants living in novel settings and an ocean removed from Europe, they did not ignore tradition. Instead, Protestants used history extensively accompanied by the conviction that past precedents were determinative for the present.

Gutacker's book is relatively short for such an important argument. Readers may wish he had filled more pages and bolstered his account with reflections on the value and authority of history for both ordinary and Christian Americans. Even though he does not venture into these considerations, his book is valuable for any historians still prone to characterize American Protestantism as proudly ignorant of the past and shamelessly confident in its innovations.

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