

Pulpit and Nation: Clergymen and the Politics of Revolutionary America. By Spencer W. McBride (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2017) Pp. 272. Cloth, \$39.50.

Spencer McBride's *Pulpit and Nation: Clergymen and the Politics of Revolutionary America* ushers in a new examination of Protestant ministers and their role in the early American political culture. The author traces religious involvement from colonial times and ends with a discussion about Christianity and the myth of the Christian president emerging in the Early Republic. McBride's work follows in the footsteps of John Fea, Amanda Porterfield, and other historians in early American religion by providing an innovative examination that repudiates contrived views of religion in the founding generation. He illuminates how the American patriots used religious symbolism and imagery to support their revolutionary activities, which over time became incorporated into the American identity.

McBride begins by exploring the role religion played in the Second Continental Congress, as members declared days of fasting and prayer. He shows that these ritual days reflected Americans' deep ties in the political and religious ethos of Great Britain and its colonies, but also evolved to fit the needs of the new nation at the start of the Revolution. After independence, fast day decrees "no longer portrayed Great Britain merely as a parent state guilty of mistreating its colonies," but depicted the mother country as an anti-Christian tyrant bent on destroying America's liberty (27). Thus, religion and politics became deeply entwined and these proclamations symbolically made a larger revolutionary appeal across Christian denominations.

McBride then looks at the role of clergymen in the political arena. Chapter Two examines the overall role of chaplains in the Continental Army to show how they did more than just pray and preach sermons to boost soldiers' confidence (40). McBride tells how General George Washington petitioned for more chaplains for the army as a way to control vices such as drunkenness and gambling (42). The author also suggests that Washington compared the Continental Army to the Army of Israel to heighten support. Chapter Three examines the experiences of three specific ministers: Samuel Seabury, James Madison (the second cousin of President James Madison), and John Joachim Zubly. These clergymen wrote pamphlets and tracts that tangled politics and religion. For each of these men, the Revolution had different outcomes because of their personal political choices. For example, Zubly decided to remain with the British and fell upon hard times. Ultimately, McBride shows how these men remained true to their calling yet could not escape the politics of their time.

As the political factions turned into political parties in the new Republic, religion also became a dividing point. Federalist ministers believed that Republicans supporting the French Revolution held their religious convictions loosely in favor of their political loyalties. McBride mentions that Federalist Reverend Jedediah Morse believed that Democratic-Republican clubs and the Republican Party meddled with dangerous ideas like anarchy, conspiracy, and atheism and that "all God-fearing Americans" should vote for a Federalist candidate "to save American religious life" (139). In the early Republic, religious figures openly used the pulpit for political gains to help push their agendas. Federalist preachers painted Republicans as atheist and radical Francophiles. These labels forged the divisions among political parties even further. McBride paints this division with wonderful examples from sermons and pamphlets.

McBride frames Chapter Six around the Election of 1800 and examines the role religion played in one of the most dramatic elections in American history. Federalist clergymen like Timothy Dwight suggested Thomas Jefferson was a product of the Enlightenment and if elected he would be responsible for unraveling American religion and society (153). Federalist newspapers and pamphlets attacked Jefferson's religious views. The Election of 1800 politicized American religion. Republicans defended Jefferson from Federalist attacks that cast him as an atheist or a deist (162). Rumors concerning his religious beliefs continued to dog Jefferson after his time in office, and the former president reportedly accepted Christianity in 1816. Yet, McBride debunks this myth of Jefferson's newfound Christianity, suggesting many historians have misinterpreted the president's statements on religion. In clarifying Jefferson's religious views, McBride argues that "the first manifestation of the myth of the Christian president" occurred in 1800 as a Federalist invention to sway voter opinion and win the presidency, a strategy that has continued into the present day.

Indeed, McBride's conclusion is the most intriguing section of *Pulpit and Nation* where he wrestles with the muddled nature of twenty-first century American religion and politics. He touches on recent controversial debates about the founding of the United States as a "Christian Nation." In contrast to the slanted writings of author David Barton, McBride proposes that there is no simple and clear-cut answer, but notes that to suggest that all the Founding Fathers were in agreement about religion would be a folly.

McBride's *Pulpit and Nation* is a well-researched and well-written monograph that deserves attention for its fresh look at American religion in the Revolutionary era. This monograph would be great for undergraduate and graduate classes alike, as well as the general public. McBride's writing is easy to understand and he amasses a great amount of primary and secondary sources that support his clear and convincing thesis. Although his thesis seems almost instinctive to historians of the time period, McBride advances the conversation of religious and political climate in the Early Republic by showing the importance of clergymen as actors rather than just cultural bystanders in the formation of American political identity.

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