

Christian. As a Baptist I don't agree with a few of the specific practical suggestions he proposes (although I agree with most of them), and I am a bit uneasy with the implications of the kind of cross-denominational cooperation he recommends without careful articulation of important doctrinal distinctions. However, it is actually as a conservative Baptist that I find Dreher's central ideas so refreshing and necessary. The principles in *The Benedict Option* are essentially the same core ideas espoused by conservative Christianity: orthopathy, transcendent beauty, holiness, reverent worship, and community. If we want to be effective missionaries in the unbelieving culture—and we should; it is the mission Christ gave us—then we need to first recover what it means to be Christian. This is the heart of the Benedict Option.

Scott Aniol

*The Bible Cause: A History of the American Bible Society*, by John Fea. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 356 pp. \$29.95.

The American Bible Society (ABS) enjoyed its 200th anniversary in 2016. As part of its commemoration, they recruited noted historian John Fea to write a history of their organization. Fea is Professor of American History and Chair of the History Department at Messiah College in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. His prior books include *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation*, *Why Study History?* and *Confessing History* (which he edited with Jay Green and Eric Miller). *The Bible Cause* tells the fascinating story of how the ABS has consistently interacted with American history for the last two hundred years.

Two hundred years is a long time and brings much change with it, which Fea chronicles. Yet despite the change that comes with time Fea argues that the ABS has consistently held two central ideas: first, the belief “that the Bible, as the word of God, offers a message of salvation for humankind and thus must be distributed as widely as possible in a language and form that people will understand” (3); and second, the ABS has a self-diagnosed mandate “to build a Christian civilization in the United States and, eventually, around the world” (3). Fea also sees four further aspects that are central to the story: “The American Bible Society has always been a Christian organization that is interdenominational in scope;” “The American Bible Society has always sought to work from a position of religious and cultural power in the United States;” “The American Bible Society has always been at the forefront of innovation, both in American Christianity and the nation as a whole;” and “The American Bible Society has struggled over the years to define its organizational identity” (6). The result has been that the ABS “has been inseparable from the American experience” (7).

In its founding in New York City in May 1816, the ABS saw itself as an antidote to irreligious impulses in America. Those present at its

founding included Nathaniel Taylor, Gardiner Spring, Jedidiah Morse, Lyman Beecher, and even James Fenimore Cooper. The connection of the ABS to high-profile Americans continued throughout its history as men such as Francis Scott Key, John Quincy Adams, Theodore Roosevelt, Harry S Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Billy Graham have all been involved with or endorsed the ABS.

It is impossible to list every event that Fea addresses in his book, but several are worth mentioning. Fea traces how the ABS met various challenges such as the Civil War, immigration, reconstruction, the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy, segregation, depression, and world wars. Fea also gives illuminating histories of when the ABS pushed hard, but ultimately failed, to provide a Bible for every American. Several chapters also detail when the ABS worked outside the United States in places like the Levant, Mexico, China, and Asia. In its early days, the ABS was interdenominational but strongly anti-Catholic. This sentiment changed in the middle of the twentieth century as the ecumenical movement gained steam. The ABS largely agreed with the ministry of the World Council of Churches and was a major player in the founding of the United Bible Society in the 1940s. The ABS had a long-standing policy that they were in the business of distributing Bibles “without comment” and their participation in the larger ecumenical movement did not change this. However, Fea recognizes the “practical kind of ecumenism” (218) that their participation entailed. Another fascinating era in the history of the ABS was the debates surrounding Bible translation theory that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. The *Good News for Modern Man* translation of the New Testament that the ABS published in 1966 was a lightning rod for English speaking Christians.

In all, Fea convincingly shows that the history of the ABS parallels the history of America. The ABS consistently aligned with the segment of American Christianity that was at the center of cultural influence at the time. Following the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy the ABS worked with the mainline denominations. This began to change in the middle of the twentieth century. And when evangelicals exploded on to the cultural scene in the 1970s the ABS worked more closely with them.

Institutional histories are not always the liveliest of reads, but Fea breaks the trend. Though it does have some dry parts, the book rarely gets bogged down in tedious details but instead connects to larger themes in American church history. The book is sympathetic of the ABS largely, I presume, because the author appreciates much of its history. Fea notes in the introduction that he was given full academic freedom but this does not stop him from being critical at certain points, such as how the ABS was implicitly compliant with segregation. In its storytelling, connection to larger themes of American church history, choice of emphases, and general tenor, the book is a success.

The ABS has for two hundred years had a simple goal: to put the Bible into as many hands as possible. This was based on the belief that the Bible is powerful and can change people if they read it (though Fea shows that for many the Bible functioned merely as an amulet). *The*

*Bible Cause* shows that even a simple task, such as distributing Bibles, is necessarily tied to larger theological and political idea. How that played out in the ABS makes this book worth reading. How the book connects to larger historical themes is masterful. In Fea's capable hands, *The Bible Cause* is an illuminating walking tour of the last two hundred years of American church history.

Matthew C. Shrader

*American Colonial History: Clashing Cultures and Faiths*, by Thomas S. Kidd. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. 329 pp. \$20.00.

Astonishing changes took place on the continent of North America between the years 1492 and 1763. Prior to Columbus a state of constant social, religious, and cultural flux existed. European presence was nearly nil and multitudes of Native American tribes were spread from the Pacific to the Atlantic. By the time the Seven Years War ended, Britain had laid claim to the most strategic parts of colonial America. European settlements were spread from California to Connecticut. So much had changed that enough American colonists felt they could liberate themselves from their European rule. How the continent came to this point is the subject of Thomas Kidd's *American Colonial History*. Kidd completed his Ph.D. under George Marsden at Notre Dame and is distinguished professor of history at Baylor University. He is a prolific author whose previous works include *Baptists in America* (with Barry Hankins), *George Whitefield, God of Liberty*, and *The Great Awakening*.

This book primarily serves as a textbook and gives a general history, yet it still makes an argument. Kidd sees the themes of *religion* and *conflict* as pervasive throughout American colonial history. The underlying thesis is that when people came together in the New World conflict was inevitable. And, within the historical era studied, religion dwelt at the center of the conflict. Kidd explains that "many in early America interpreted their interactions with their rivals, including violence and enslavement, through the lens of religion and spiritual beliefs" (xi). Kidd continues by saying he hopes his readers "will come away with a distinct sense of how pervasive religion was in colonial America, and of the varied functions that religion served in the era, functions that were variously inspiring and appalling" (xii).

Kidd spends chapter one describing the pre-1492 North American world. Europeans brought stability (eventually) to the region, but they also brought disease and radically different social, political, and religious ideals. Chapter two discusses the Spanish reach in Mexico, Texas, and across into California. Chapter three chronicles the French work that took place mostly in Canada. Both the Spanish and the French found a foothold in these areas, but it came at great cost to themselves and to Native Americans. Chapters four through seven explain the colonies