

tization of capital, that Milken and his firm Drexel's guilt was "decided in the prosecutorial hothouse atmosphere of the late 1980s," and that "an important source of capital for small- and medium-sized businesses is now in danger." All this, by the way, at the same time one could read on page one of the *Journal* what later became James B. Stewart's exposé, *Den of Thieves*.

Alas, Grant, who himself might be called a gold-standard, balanced-budget, keep-out-of-the-affairs-of-private-individuals kind of conservative, doesn't confront the *Journal* in his book. But in May 1990, he told *The American Spectator*: "Libertarians are children in financial matters. They don't know a good bond from a bad bond, or a promoter from a reasonably self-respecting banker. When someone says, 'The government did it,' they have Michael Milken to tea. Big mistake." He summed up, "The fact is that the American credit system has evolved away from liquidity and individual responsibility toward illiquidity and collective responsibility." Grant sees in this trend "the socialization of credit risk, a state-sponsored phenomenon. Without that, without the Too Big To Fail doctrine and the evolution of deposit insurance, and the partial deregulation of the thrifts, without all of this, there would have been nothing like the junk bond industry."

Milken plays a relatively small part in *Money of the Mind*, coming, as he does, at the end of the story. The author told the *Bond Buyer* in 1991 that his book "asked the question of how it was that they sent credit cards to golden retrievers, or how it was that Trump was able to borrow as he borrowed." His book describes "the evolution of American credit." The key word is evolution. According to Grant, the 1980s boom in credit—the money of the mind—was the perfectly logical result of years of destruction of hard money by the federal government: "Central banking, federal subsidies, paper money, deposit insurance, and full disclosure have each fallen short of the claims of their respective promoters."

Grant tells the story in a way most people, whose business reading usually ends with their savings account pass-books, can understand. Even lawmakers and congressmen will be able to understand it, but that is not to say that *Money*

of the Mind will affect public policy. Politicians will be politicians, after all, and the way to get votes is to encourage easy money. In fact, one cannot underestimate the impact this book will have on public policy. Grant puckishly acknowl-

edges as much at the end of his book, and adds: "Knowing the past, one reads the morning newspapers with a sense of fatalism. One believes in the powers of markets and reason but not in the perfectability of lenders and borrowers." □

THE AMERICAN RELIGION: THE EMERGENCE OF THE POST-CHRISTIAN NATION

Harold Bloom

Simon & Schuster/288 pages/\$22

reviewed by ELIZABETH KRISTOL

Harold Bloom begins his latest book with the statement: "This is an American literary critic's book about the inner spirit of our national faith. . . ." As if these words are not chilling enough, consider the credentials Bloom presents for the task: he is an "unbeliever" of "strong Gnostic tendencies," who has an "obsession with the American varieties of Orphism and Gnosticism, of Enthusiasm and Antinomianism." Only someone who uses words like that could even think in terms of the American religion, an artificial construct that is meaningful only to intellectuals who have little respect for actual religious experience. And only a deconstructionist could manage to make his own generalizations so incoherent.

Even the notion "The American Religion" keeps shifting. First we are told that all Americans are, unknowingly, followers of gnosticism, a second-century religious heresy that preached the identity of the Creation and the Fall, and the ability of the individual, who contains a spark of the divine, to labor his way back to an unfallen state. Before we can recover from this blindside, Bloom announces that the American Religion is actually a form of "information anxiety." Then we are told, in no uncertain terms, that "the flag and the fetus" are emblems of the American Religion, and that "Reagan-Bush national Re-

publicans have become one with the American Religion." Bloom never explains whether these various definitions carry equal weight; if they do, President Bush can presumably number gnosticism among his political liabilities in November.

Whatever the American Religion is, Bloom is not happy with it. We are, he tells us again and again, a "nation obsessed with religion." We are "religiously mad" and "dangerously religion-soaked." In case we've missed the point, our religious sentiments are "fierce," "raging," "violent." In an effort to trace this national obsession, Bloom takes us on a tour of some indigenous religious groups, including the Mormons, Christian Scientists, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Southern Baptists. (He notes that Catholics, Jews, and Mainline Protestants also follow The American Religion, but he is more intrigued by the uniquely American variations.)

Bloom insists that he will "seek the religion in religion" and not judge spiritual matters by literary standards. But his prejudices make him incapable of assessing religion on its own terms. Some of his biases might have been overcome had he at least made an effort to travel around the country getting to know actual churchgoers, attending a variety of services, studying liturgies, listening to church music, or immersing himself in the dynamics of parish life. But Bloom inhabits a world of words and ideas. "Obsessed" with religion he may be, but he is clearly repulsed by the thought of con-

Elizabeth Kristol has written for *The American Spectator*, *Commentary*, *First Things*, and *the Washington Post*.

fronting, up close, the ways in which Americans actually manifest their beliefs.

In the face of so much alien behavior Bloom falls back on what he knows best: literary criticism. Indeed, he boasts that he has “read and reread everything that remotely could be considered to be an American religious text.” So truncated is his secular, professorial worldview that he genuinely convinces himself that a religious faith is the sum of its writings; reading Bloom on the subject of religion is like reading a restaurant critic who only evaluates menus.

In fact, *The American Religion* rapidly devolves into an almost comical ranking of different faiths based on Bloom’s idiosyncratic aesthetic criteria. Mormonism takes the award in nearly every category. Bloom finds Joseph Smith, its founder, a paragon of “religion-making genius.” Not only did he have the boldness of vision to create a major religion, but he authored the vastly influential *Book of Mormon*. Perhaps more important, in Bloom’s view, he showed himself to be a skilled literary critic: “Smith’s insight could have come only from a remarkably apt reading of the Bible, and there I would locate the secret of his religious genius. He was anything but a great writer, but he was a great reader, or creative misreader, of the Bible.” In keeping with his notion of religious criticism, Bloom lavishes his favor on those who create, rather than follow, religions: “. . . as a religious critic I judge Smith to be greater and more interesting than the current faith of the people that he created.”

Christian Science receives a lower score from Bloom, largely because its founder, Mary Baker Eddy, was not as clever or charismatic as Smith; “Joseph Smith had a powerful religion-making imagination, whereas Mary Baker Eddy had close to no imagination at all.” And the religious text she authored, *Science and Health*, “is the antithesis of humor or good writing.”

Seventh-Day Adventism fares even worse. While its founder, Ellen White, “is more readable than Mrs. Eddy,” there is little to relieve her “murky drabness.” Bloom complains, “This founder of a persistent American sect badly needed education in religious writing.” Even though she was given to trances and ecstatic states, “her diction remained faith-

ful to a Maine lawyer’s office.” Bloom concludes: “She lacked the religion-making imagination of Joseph Smith; audacity and humor were no part of her.”

Jehovah’s Witnesses come in for still harsher criticism. “To consider Jehovah’s Witnesses in the here-and-now necessarily has to be a somewhat painful intellectual experience. Anti-intellectualism among millenarians and Bible literalists is a recurrent phenomenon, but no other religious movement in America ever has been as programatically set against its intellect as are Jehovah’s Witnesses.” Bloom is also appalled that the Jehovah’s Witnesses chose as their “preferred text” the Book of Revelation. “The influence of Revelation,” declares Bloom, “always has been out of all proportion to its literary strength or spiritual value.” It is a “lurid and inhumane work,” and was “very poorly composed in the original.” Bloom concludes that the Jehovah’s Witnesses movement is “intellectually weak” and “spiritually empty.”

But the bulk of Bloom’s wrath is reserved for what he calls the fundamentalist wing of the Southern Baptist Convention. He regards the growing power of fundamentalists—i.e., those who take the Bible literally—as a menace to all forms of social, political, and intellectual life. Fundamentalism is “the great curse of all American religion, and of all religion in this American century,” announces Bloom. The “viciousness” of American fundamentalism, “makes it shockingly similar to Iranian Shiite Fundamentalism or the worst excesses of the Neturei Karta in Israel.” In another burst of multiculturalism, he adds that it reminds him of the “Spanish Fascism of Franco.”

Bloom could show some small (if distorted) respect for religions that have founders, authors, and texts. But fundamentalists are a different kettle of fish; they have just one text, the Bible, and—as Bloom sees it—no one even bothers to interpret it. This “anti-intellectualism” drives Bloom ballistic. He blasts fundamentalists—or “Know-Nothings,” as he repeatedly calls them—for their “almost lunatic resentment of mind,” their “drive against thought itself,” their “contempt for all ideas.” (The list goes on.) What particularly disgusts Bloom—Bloom the literary critic, Bloom the creative “misreader”—is the docility with which fun-

damentalists approach the written word. They simply take the Bible at face value! As a shocked Bloom puts it, fundamentalists “insist that the Bible reads itself (as it were), requires no interpretation, declares its literal and unerring truth in every verse.” They do not realize that “reading is a skill,” and that “the Bible is the most difficult of all difficult books.”

Bloom explains that the dominance of low-brow culture in America today has made the Bible “almost impossible to read for all except an elite.” Fundamentalists *claim* to read the Bible, says Bloom, but its “language is too remote and difficult for them to begin to understand. What is left is the Bible as physical object, limp and leather, a final icon or magical talisman.” They fail to appreciate that “theology depends upon analogies, arguments, metaphors, all of which enforce the difference between words and the realities they represent. Fundamentalist Baptists never even seem to realize that the Bible is in the first place language.” Bloom offers what he believes is a telling example: “If you listen to an audio tape by the venerable Criswell in which he purports to interpret a biblical text, you hear, not an exegete, but someone who has not yet realized that the Bible is written in words.”

Not an exegete! Ouch! But for Bloom this statement is truly damning. In both his 1990 best-seller *The Book of J* and *The American Religion*, it emerges that Bloom sees the role of the religious critic as one who leads the reader away from God, toward literature. For example, in speculating about J, the author of key portions of the Pentateuch, Bloom posited that such an intelligent and gifted writer must have been an “immensely sophisticated” and “ironic” unbeliever—just like Bloom. Someone as clever as J could not possibly have believed in a God, but could only have created one.

As for his purpose in depicting J in this manner, Bloom commented: “I do not think that appreciating J will help us love God or arrive at the spiritual or historical truth of whatever Bible. I want the varnish off because it conceals a writer of the eminence of Shakespeare or Dante, and such a writer is worth more than many creeds, many churches, many scholarly certainties.” This reverse-missionary zeal continues in *The American*

Religion, as Bloom repeatedly chastises preachers for focusing on the message of the Bible rather than its metaphors. Indeed, he believes that "one of the uses of religious criticism is that it is the appropriate instrument for dissecting, understanding, and perhaps someday destroying Fundamentalism."

Convincing readers by intellectual argument is one thing; the prejudice Bloom so freely displays is quite another. Religious leaders have been arguing for years that intolerance toward religious believers is the last acceptable form of bigotry in this country. Hollywood routinely churns out make-fun-of-nuns movies, and intellectuals have even fewer inhibitions against mocking people who take faith seriously. Thus Bloom can make sweeping references to "Know-Nothings," to the "functional illiteracy" of fundamentalist ministers, and to the "obscure, perhaps permanent, fear and dislike of language in so many working-class Southern Baptists." His revulsion toward those who choose to believe in the Bible (not to mention toward Southerners and, one suspects, members of any socioeconomic class other than his own) is so socially acceptable as to go unremarked in the press.

It is a curious fact that Bloom finds himself imperiled by Bible-toting fanatics, especially since religious believers are convinced that *they* are the ones who are imperiled—by a dominant secular culture represented by the likes of Harold Bloom. One suspects that there is more than religion at stake for Bloom. And sure enough, *The American Religion* closes with an apocalyptic political vision as impassioned as any put forth by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In Bloom's nightmare, the Religious Right takes over America. Bloom observes that Mormons have already infiltrated "the FBI, CIA, and allied organizations." He reminds us that Billy Graham has been cozy with a number of Presidents and suggests that it was no accident that Assembly of God member James Watt served in a high-level position in the Reagan Administration. Bloom is especially alarmed by what he perceives as a "curious, at least tacit alliance" between the Mormons and the Southern Baptist Fundamentalists. "Neither of these would acknowledge the alliance," he adds conspiratorially, "but it

is at the center of the loose but dangerously strong coalition of American Religionists that now guarantee the continued ascendancy of the Reagan-Bush dynasty." Factor in President Bush's obsession with "the flag and the fetus" and the Department of Justice's support of "the Operation Rescue mob," and the conspiracy theory is complete:

We are on the verge of being governed by a nationally established religion, an ultimate parody of the American Religion sketched in this book. The Established Church of the South and South-

west, the Southern Baptist Convention, and the burgeoning, soon-to-be Established Church of the West, the Mormons, are only two components of a multiform alliance that will transform our nation by the year 2000, under the leadership of a Republican Party that since 1979 has become the barely secular version of the American Religion.

Christianity, Judaism, the Bible—these, Bloom demolishes with ease. A few Republican Presidents, however, and the critic from Yale discovers he hasn't got a prayer. □

DE GAULLE: THE RULER, 1945-1970

Jean Lacouture

W.W. Norton/640 pages/\$29.95

reviewed by MARK FALCOFF

French journalist-historian Jean Lacouture needed 500-odd pages to tell the story of Charles De Gaulle's life up to 1944 in *De Gaulle: The Rebel*. In *De Gaulle: The Ruler*, he needs nearly 700 more to complete the tale, which includes two presidencies and two periods of enforced political retirement. At that, the two volumes in English are merely a condensation of a much longer biography in French.

The Ruler is superior to its predecessor. The publisher has switched translators; the English now has a more graceful, mid-Atlantic feel to it, and footnotes clear up some of the obscurer French references. We get a better look at De Gaulle the man—largely because most of the people close to him in the later period were still alive to be interviewed by Lacouture. And in this volume the author has managed to establish some distance from his subject: the prose is less adoring, less supine; the tone less hushed. Not everyone who ever

Mark Falcoff is resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. He reviewed the first volume of Lacouture's biography in the July 1991 TAS.

disagreed with De Gaulle is depicted as perverse or misguided; indeed, some of the Americans in this book come off better than they deserve. While Lacouture is obviously impressed with the coherence of De Gaulle's strategic vision, he keeps reminding his French readers that much of it was fantasy—the real world wasn't like that at all.

In 1944 De Gaulle returned to Paris as head of a makeshift Liberation movement that briefly but successfully combined his own Free French with the (largely Communist-controlled) Résistance. Over the next year and a half, he managed to break with his Communist allies, disarm their partisans, avert civil war, obtain for France a place on the Security Council of the new United Nations, and revive the nation's identity as an independent actor. The neatest trick of all was to get the Allies to seat France at the table of victors, rather than treat it as it arguably deserved—like collaborationist Austria or Hungary.

Once French politics-as-usual resumed, however, De Gaulle found himself out in the cold; when he resigned out of frustration in 1946, he expected to be called back