

BOOK REVIEWS

of the average citizen in this time of limited suffrage and negligible national or local government presence, or whether the author has adequately dealt with the notion of deferential politics in the early republic. Further, although our appreciation of the role of political celebrations has been enlarged, it seems a great leap to find in them the nearly singular well-spring of American nationalism, as Waldstreicher suggests. Perhaps an extension of the sort of scholarly dialogue now taking place among historians of the antebellum period would further test his conclusions. Waldstreicher would certainly be an important contributor to such a conversation.

Readers of *Fides et Historia* may be disappointed, as I was, with the absence of nearly any attention to the role of popular religion in the author's case for the formation of American nationalism. Waldstreicher depends heavily on Harry S. Stout's excellent study, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York, 1986), Stout's article on the Federalist clergy in Mark Noll's *Religion and American Politics* (New York, 1990), and the published sermons of that region's clergy, but gives little attention to the scholarship on popular religion in the early republic. It can be granted that a single-minded commitment to evangelism by Baptist and Methodist ministers of this time may have discouraged political involvement among many of their flock, and that parades, toasts, or even fast days were ill-suited to the religious sensitivities of much of the rural south and west. But in considering those forces shaping the national spirit in the generation before 1820, one can hardly ignore such powerful popular movements as the Second Great Awakening and the explosive national expansion among evangelical churches. For starters, had Professor Waldstreicher considered other pieces in the volume edited by Mark Noll, he would have encountered Nathan Hatch's insightful article, "The Democratization of Christianity and the Character of American Politics," covering the same period, and presenting a compelling case for taking seriously these popular churches in the formation of an American national consciousness. For example: "However powerful working-class organizations became in cities such as New York and Baltimore, their presence cannot compare with the phenomenal growth, and collective *elan*, of Methodists, Baptists, Christians, Millerites, and Mormons [the groups Hatch studies]. It was the lay preachers in the early republic who became the most effective agents in constructing new frames of reference for people living through a profoundly transitional age" (92).

In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes was awarded the Jamestown Prize for 1995, and is based on Waldstreicher's dissertation at Yale. He has taught there, as well as at Bennington College. Although this reader would have preferred the inclusion of a bibliography, allowing for a more systematic review of the author's sources, the footnotes reflect extensive research in the primary and secondary materials. Professor Waldstreicher's unusual angle of vision on the politics of the Revolution and early republic will hopefully stimulate further conversation on these formative years of the Republic.

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PETER W. WILLIAMS, *Houses of God: Region, Religion, and Architecture in the United States*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997. Pp. xxi + 321. \$34.95.

Reviewed by James Hudnut-Beumler, Columbia Theological Seminary

For the first time, in this book the story of America's places of worship are told from the standpoint of region. Usually, when religious architecture is chronicled it is treated from the standpoint of either style or "first of its type still standing." The first is the interest of the art and architecture historians. The latter is the passion of the antiquarian. Here at last we have a book that treats architecture as an artifact of American religious history. The buildings and landscapes themselves become evidence of the religious activity of people in the past. From this starting point, Williams can attend to other categories that intersect with his topics—ethnicity, religious traditions, style, social class, and so forth. Williams utilizes the concept of "cultural hearth" to gain insight from his geographical approach. This works exceedingly well for New England, the South, and the West, but only in a limited way for the Midwest, or as he prefers, the "Old-Northwest."

This account is accessible to the non-specialist. Williams is gifted at explaining unfamiliar construction techniques and at linking structure to liturgy, ethnicity, and available materials. Indeed, *Houses of God* contains much to commend itself to historians. It is remarkably free of architectural jargon, and instead features many well-turned phrases and interesting asides. Read aloud, this urbane guide to the religious built environment will bring enormous pleasure. And Williams, an historian of American religion, is acutely sensitive to the religious dimension of the built environment. In discussing pulpits, pews, and altars, for instance, he dispenses neat lessons on what their form, size, and relative positions meant for the faith enacted around them.

If the regional take on the religious built environment displays some observable limitations, it ought to at the very least to make historians start thinking about other schema for organizing what is knowable about Americans' holy and churchly places and what they mean. In providing this impetus to further reflection, Peter Williams has performed an immense service for interpreters of the American religious experience.

Since it is Williams's purpose to examine the built environment of religion in the United States, "with special attention to the importance of geographical and cultural *region* in shaping that expression," it is fair to ask whether the built environment story best tells itself from the perspective of region. In short, is it a regional story? The geographical schema poses some risks. Do Methodists in Denver and Boston think of themselves more as Westerners and New Englanders than as Methodists? In the end, this is a question *Houses of God* cannot, by itself, answer. But it is such a novel and singular question that it deserves to be taken up by other authors in the field. Religious traditions do count for Williams, but so does a sense of place and increasingly, through his eyes, we see that it does for the people who built churches, synagogues, and temples in particular places and times.