

BOOK REVIEWS

***Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land*, by Mark David Hall**

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Mark David Hall. 2023. *Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land: How Christianity Has Advanced Freedom and Equality for All Americans*. New York: Fidelis Books.

Mark David Hall, Herbert Hoover Distinguished Professor of Politics at George Fox University, is one of our leading students of the role of religion in American history, politics, and constitutional law. As such, he is one of a handful of people capable of writing *Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land*, a sweeping, synoptic, and (perhaps most importantly) widely accessible account of how, as the subtitle says, "Christianity has advanced freedom and equality for all Americans."

In one sense, Hall's argument is not new. A similar argument could, for example, be constructed from elliptical suggestions made by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, albeit without the sustained argument helpfully offered in this book. We could also find a similar judgment in Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, though the great Frenchman might find a bit more tension between freedom and equality than does Hall.

But the fact that Hall's is an "old" argument does not make it any less necessary and timely. We live in a time when secularism seems ascendent; when once uncontroversial laws protecting religious freedom elicit charges of bigotry, homophobia, and transphobia; and when men and women with religiously inspired conscientious scruples about the latest demands from the Left face calls for their removal from their positions in our leading cultural and educational institutions. Hall provides ample materials for those interested either in exploring the question of whether Christianity is good for America or in affirming that without Christianity the American experiment would likely not have succeeded.

While I have my doubts about whether our "cultured despisers of religion" will pay attention to or be persuaded by Hall, there are two kinds of Christians who ought to take the book's challenges seriously. On the one side are the Hauerwasian "resident aliens," who are so committed to a countercultural City of God that they prefer political and national homelessness to embracing and informing a national community. On the other are the integralists and "common good conservatives," who are so convinced of the utter secularity

of American principles that they feel called to capture and baptize the public square. Throughout our history, Hall demonstrates, Americans have been religious without being monastic or theocratic. They have carried their faith into the public arena without adulterating it with merely worldly concerns and without giving in to the temptation of theocracy.

Having thus insisted on the timeliness, importance, and high quality of Hall's project, I must do what all reviewers are called to do: I must quibble. To be sure, at the end of the book, Hall admits one of the things about which I would have quibbled. As someone who confesses that he is relieved when the preacher finally announces that he's on his third point, I appreciate Hall's desire to keep the book short. However, I gladly acknowledge and praise Hall's recognition that a longer book would have contained a chapter that "trac[es] the ongoing fight for racial equality through the Reconstruction Era and the Civil Rights Movement to the present day" (199).

Two of my other quibbles might serve to complicate (and surely also lengthen) Hall's argument. While he is very good at pointing out the anti-Catholic origins of the rigid and doctrinaire separationism that was for an extended period ordained by the Supreme Court as the law of the land, Hall doesn't say much about the Roman Catholic contribution to America's liberal and democratic political and cultural landscape. For example, a brief discussion of John Courtney Murray's *We Hold These Truths* would not have taken Hall too far afield. This could also have deepened his discussion of the Supreme Court's treatment of First Amendment religion cases by adding some consideration of the role of natural law in the thinking of our Roman Catholic jurists.

Another complicating consideration would have involved a treatment of the Social Gospel. While I acknowledge that much of Hall's argument is, in a sense, defensive or apologetic in the way that Christians recognize, it would also be useful to offer an account of this religious movement that many secular liberals and progressives more or less embrace. I can imagine an engagement with progressive and modernist Christianity that complicates the harmony between liberty and equality that seems close to the core of Hall's argument. And I can imagine a treatment of this movement that could serve as a kind of cautionary tale for many of Hall's conservative and evangelical readers.

But these are, as I said, quibbles. I do not mean to detract from the value of this particular fruit of Hall's immense industry and learning. *Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land* deserves a place on the bookshelf of every scholar, pastor, and thoughtful Christian who seeks a brief and accessible account of its subject.

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