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 ***The Highly Favored Nation: The Bible and Canadian Meaning,
1860-1900 (review)***

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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In his seminal 1965 essay, ‘Sermon Literature and Canadian Intellectual History,’ Sid Wise argued that sermons were a rich source for understanding the uncharted waters of Canadian intellectual life. Preston Jones develops this insight in *A Highly Favored Nation*. He is most interested in how leading members of clergy, politicians, and intellectuals employed the Bible in their ideas about the Canadian identity. His analysis is based on printed sermon literature, along with political speeches, newspaper articles, and journals of opinion. Throughout the book, he identifies the biblical references that shaped much of the political discourse of late Victorian Canada.

Jones shows that a sense of divine mission was integral to ideas about Canadian national destiny. He argues that John Webster Grant’s contention in *The Church in the Canadian Era* that ‘even in the mid-nineteenth century Canadians were not prone to interpreting their nation as divinely chosen’ is overstated. That Canada was a ‘highly favored nation’ or Canadians were ‘a people highly favored of God’ – ideas often associated with the American Puritan tradition – were also part of the Canadian national discourse. In the chapter on the Bible in Quebec, Jones lays to rest the false dichotomy that, while Protestants were a people of the Book, Catholics practised a ritualized or sacramental faith and were shielded from the Bible. He shows that the French-Canadian sense of destiny and survival in North America was informed by the Bible as was that of English-speaking Protestants. Each culture drew on a similar sense of biblically based mission to advance its unique national identity and argue for its triumph from sea to sea. Conflict emerged from competing visions of similar biblical texts. **[End Page 338]** It is unfortunate that these provocative ideas were not explored more fully and substantiated with more extensive historical evidence in this brief volume. Rarely does Jones’s research move beyond well-known printed sources.

On a popular level, Jones demonstrates that the Bible was inculcated

differently in Quebec. He notes the biblical stories were instilled through the rich iconography of Quebec culture, especially the sculptures, stained-glass windows, and paintings that adorned the Catholic church. Here again one wishes for a fuller treatment of how the Bible was translated into French-Canadian folk culture. By not following up on this insight Jones misses an opportunity to greatly enhance this study. Similarly, the author might have explored the circulation of the Bible more fully. For example, research into the activities of Bible and Tract societies in English-speaking Canada would have strengthened his arguments about the dissemination and importance of the Bible. Some research into the importance of the family Bible might have been helpful. Analysis of the many Bibles offered for sale in the Eaton's catalogue (for many, another kind of bible!) would have made the argument that Canada was a Bible-based culture more concrete. In this regard, Jones's work is sadly uninformed by recent American and British scholarship on the Bible and the marketplace and its role in the domestic sphere.

Jones's account suggests another dimension to understanding the forces that contributed to the decline of biblical authority in the late nineteenth century. Apart from the assault on the Bible from critical inquiry and scientific thought, it was also diminished in popular culture. According to Jones, a cavalier use of scriptures in the public sphere led to the demeaning of the Bible and the undermining of Christian culture. For example, J.S. Woodsworth used biblical passages throughout his exposé of urban slum conditions in *My Neighbor* (1911). These passages, however, were frequently cited out of context. References by preacher-politicians, such as Woodsworth, echoed the language and cadences of the King James Bible and made reference to well-known biblical stories and characters, but they were shorn of any meaningful biblical content or theological justification. In an argument reminiscent of Ramsay Cook in *The Regenerators*, Jones concludes that those politicians, nationalists, and clergy intent on creating a Christian culture by...

fringe of colonial society and reveals the previously obscured conflicts that surrounded the place of their work and communities in the ideological and economic quarrels of their day. Samson's work, as well as that of other recent scholars, has shown us that, although often at odds with the ethos of powerful elements in society, the rural was a fundamental component of colonial life, and that a full understanding of Canadian history cannot be contemplated without appreciating this fact.

DAVID BENT *University of New Brunswick*

The Highly Favored Nation: The Bible and Canadian Meaning, 1860–1900. PRESTON JONES. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007. Pp. 132, US\$22.00

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