

to follow Ronald White in describing Lincoln as a seeker whose “position changed from simple fatalism to a belief in a providential God who used people and events for beneficent purposes” (35). Especially during the Civil War, “biblical language becomes more pervasive in his speeches” (107). Although Leidner is careful to offer no “absolute conclusions about his personal faith,” he cannot resist suggesting that Lincoln “had undergone a significant change of heart before the last year of his life,” and found in the Bible “his firm place to stand” (140, 144).

But Lincoln’s uses of the Bible, abundant as they are, may tell us less than we think. It is significant that Lincoln’s scriptural citations take a sharp tick upward in the 1850s, as he emerges into the front rank of antislavery activism, just as we see in his references to natural law—and no wonder, since he needed to appeal to an authority that would override the protections of statute law invoked by slaveholders. Even Leidner acknowledges that the single largest cluster of Lincoln’s scripture quotes—thirty-four of them—occurs in Lincoln’s little-known “Lecture on Discoveries and Inventions,” where Lincoln was using them “for the secular purpose of documenting what the Bible reveals about the timeline of when various inventions and discoveries were made” (7).

That the war forced Lincoln into a deeper and more complicated exploration of a personal God who mysteriously wills human events is, I think, indisputable. Whether those explorations were the result of a changed view of the Bible’s supernatural nature or authority is less certain, especially since a number of close observers of the Lincoln White House claimed that Lincoln read the Bible frequently, but read it more as literature than as an oracle. What is certain, however, is that Lincoln’s Bible reading never led him to join a church, nor led him to embrace publicly anything more theological than a confidence in divine determinism and judgment, both of which could emerge from Shakespeare as much as the Bible.

Still, Leidner has performed an invaluable service in the patient compiling of Lincoln’s biblical uses, and easily surpasses several previous itemizations of those uses by Clarence Macartney (*Lincoln and the Bible* in 1949) and Philip Ostergard (*The Inspired Wisdom of Abraham Lincoln* in 2008). Certainly for the Lincoln fraternity, it must climb to the top shelf of Lincoln reference works.

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***Storied Witness: The Theology of Black Women Preachers in 19th Century America.* By Kate Hanch. Fortress Press, 2022. xiii + 196 pp. \$28.00 paper.**

In *Storied Witness*, Rev. Dr. Kate Hanch examines the theology of three nineteenth-century Black female preachers: Zilpha Elaw, Julia Foote, and Sojourner Truth. They developed theologies that “told their world the truth about God, justice and judgment,” Hanch writes. Their preaching was “deeply biblical,” emphasizing “social justice.” Hanch hopes that an encounter with these three women may guide today’s readers into the path of justice (xii, 164).

In a time when women were barred from theological training and ordination, they could not become settled pastors. Instead, they traveled to revivals and other meetings where spiritual gifts mattered more than credentials. Slavery and racism placed even higher barriers in the way of Black preaching women. But some Black preaching women believed that God called them *because* of their marginality, just as a stone rejected by builders becomes a cornerstone (Ps. 118:22).

Each of Hanch's three subjects had roots in Methodist traditions, including holiness and perfectionism. Each one had visionary experiences. Most important for *Storied Witness*, each of these three women published a spiritual memoir. These "creative works of theology" (3) allow the author to find the theological loci of her subjects: "theological anthropology, Christology, and pneumatology" (7). Their concept of divine love and justice expresses the faith that God created all people in God's image, "and to deny that image denies the living God" (165). Yet each of these women had her own distinctive witness.

Zilpha Elaw was born free in Pennsylvania around 1790. Her baptism showed her "the equality of all persons before God" (24). For a Black woman to claim equality in those days was pure foolishness in the eyes of the dominant white culture. But since God's foolishness is revealed on the cross of Christ (1 Cor. 1:18), Elaw was willing to become a fool for Christ. Zilpha Elaw's foolishness was "both a choice and a category" in which society placed her (18–19). Elaw's *Memoir* shows her faith in God's foolishness revealed in Christ. Since God chose the weak to confound the mighty (1 Cor 1:27), Elaw dared to undertake a preaching mission in Maryland and Virginia in 1825--never mind the risk that she might be sold into slavery. Later, Elaw moved to England, where she preached more than 1,000 sermons before her death in 1873.

Julia Foote was born to former slaves in New York State in 1823. She later moved to Boston and joined the African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion (AMEZ). When her church expelled her for preaching sanctification in 1844, she became an itinerant preacher. Foote believed that God gave her the gift of holiness, making "her body a sacred carrier of the Word." As Hanch puts it, Foote's ministry involved "bodying the word." In other words, Foote's own person was "a sermonic event and established spiritual authority" (70–71). Julia Foote became the first woman to be ordained a deacon in the AMEZ (1894); and she was ordained as an elder in the AMEZ in 1900, shortly before her death.

Sojourner Truth is the best-known figure in *Storied Witness*. Born into slavery in the Hudson Valley around the year 1797, she was named Isabella. At about thirty years of age, she took refuge with abolitionist Christians and, in her new freedom, received a vision of Jesus. She felt called to preach but had to support herself as a domestic worker and find ways to preach on the side.

While Isabella was a housekeeper in New York City, her quest for spiritual community led her into a perfectionist cult called the Kingdom of Matthias. And here, Hanch makes an error in relating Truth's story. She states that Isabella parted ways with Matthias when he moved his group to a farm on the Hudson River; so she was spared the worst excesses of the fraudulent Matthias (129). Not so. Matthias sought Isabella out and persuaded her to rejoin his kingdom in its new location. There she stayed until the group came crashing down in scandals over bigamy and an accusation of murder. Around this time, Isabella gave extensive interviews to British journalist Gilbert Vale, who wrote *Fanaticism: Its Source and Influence, Illustrated by the Simple Narrative of Isabella, in the Case of Matthias*. . . (London: Forgotten Books, 2015; original 1835). It shows that Isabella stayed with the Kingdom of Matthias until its demise in 1835.

In 1843, Isabella renamed herself Sojourner Truth and become an itinerant preacher. Her wanderings led her to an abolitionist commune in Massachusetts where she met Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, and others. She began lecturing against slavery and for women's rights. According to Hanch, Truth's "works and words depict a Holy Spirit present within her" and "testified to the Holy Spirit as *withness*, including both the meaning of the Spirit within and the notion of bearing witness" (112). But Truth herself did not use the word "withness."

The themes that Hanch gives her subjects (*foolishness* for Zilpha Elaw; *bodying* for Julia Foote; and *withness* for Sojourner Truth), though perhaps oversimplified, may help some readers to understand the legacy of these women. Foolishness (in the Pauline sense) works for Elaw, but the terms "bodying" and "withness" I found to be anachronistic, reflecting more the priorities of today than of the nineteenth century. Hanch overuses these thematic words to the point of redundancy.

Even so, *Storied Witness* does well to show these three preachers as theologians in their own right. Those looking to apply the Gospel to social justice will find inspiration here. Women in ministry will want to discover these foremothers, brought near to us thanks to Kate Hanch.

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***The Spires Still Point to Heaven: Cincinnati's Religious Landscape, 1788-1873.* By Matthew Smith. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2023. X + 242pp. \$39.95 paperback; \$110.50 hardcover.**

The enormous ethnic and religious complexity of rapidly growing American cities has long been a staple for social and religious historians. Often, these studies focus on major urban places such as New York City. However, Matthew Smith's carefully researched and elegantly written volume describes the impact of religious diversity and conflict in nineteenth-century Cincinnati, then and now a mid-sized regional center. In so doing, Smith makes and supports the claim that "religion in Cincinnati was more than the sum of its marketable parts. For many Cincinnatians, especially women, black people, and immigrants, it opened the door to unprecedented engagement in the public sphere" (7).

The evolution of Cincinnati's religious life cannot be understood without a knowledge of the city's changing economic and demographic circumstances. These issues are addressed in five chapters, beginning with a discussion of early Cincinnati's high aspirations and its prominent role as a launching pad for the Protestant Benevolent Empire. From there, the discussion moves to Cincinnati's growing pains as a major regional center. Boosters wanted to promote the city as the Queen of the West, but those hopes were dashed when railroads replaced the Ohio River as the primary means of western transportation and Chicago became the metropolis Cincinnatians hoped their city would