

of a band of hard-working farmers reasoning their way toward rebellion. That was how democracy worked” (8). Is that how democracy used to work? I love this vision of democracy; it is so clean and heroic and selfless and idealistic. It is also, surprisingly, a completely apolitical vision, which sits oddly in the context of a biography that gives such close attention to Adams’ political machinations.

For most of Adams’ political life, he shared with many political thinkers a deep suspicion of democracy and popular rule. Most founders, including Samuel Adams, feared that government by the people was likely to go off the rails. But what Schiff shows us is a man captivated by the belief that people could and should contribute to a political community that exists for the public good. At this moment in our American history, Schiff has given us a story of the American Revolution with which we should all grapple.

Serena Zabin is professor of history at Carleton College. She is the author of *THE BOSTON MASSACRE: A FAMILY HISTORY* (2020).

*Adin Ballou’s Spiritual Journey through Nineteenth-Century New England: Practical Christianity.* By Bryce Hal Taylor. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022. Pp. 270. \$105.00 cloth. \$45.00 e-book.)

Adin Ballou’s spiritual journey embodied the vast religious possibilities that became available in the United States of the early nineteenth century. That is the central claim of Bryce Hal Taylor’s exhaustively researched study of Ballou’s life and writing. Taylor argues that the religious culture of New England allowed a farmer’s son to claim authority as a preacher, espouse a series of reinterpretations of major theological tenets, become a leading voice for social reform, and establish a utopian community—all while keeping established religious leaders and institutions at arm’s length. Ballou represents, according to Taylor, a key figure for understanding an era when, “for both the pastor and practitioner, one’s understanding of religion and

practice became fluid despite denominational identification” (3).

Taylor’s five chapters provide a chronological framework for Ballou’s life, with each focusing on a facet of his religious journey. The first chapter situates Ballou’s youth amid the “democratic and populist impulses” of the day, which “associated ordinary people with virtue and exalted them above the clerical elites” (11). Ballou joined his fellow citizens in undertaking his own “common sense reasoning coupled with the Bible,” and these reflections set him on the path to become a preacher in the Christian Connexion (34). Chapter two traces the evolution of Ballou’s theological outlook and his acceptance of Universalism’s message of salvation for all humanity. Taylor rightly links Ballou’s engagement in wider, contentious debates to the rapid expansion of the religious press, which provided “denominations and ambitious preachers, like Ballou, a textual soapbox to promulgate unfiltered declarations that resulted in a fragmented society” (62).

Chapter three considers Ballou’s involvement with the era’s major social reform movements of temperance and abolition. Both efforts experienced schisms, and Ballou repeatedly found himself on the unpopular side. He rejected calls to regulate liquor consumption through official means, arguing that “penal laws did little to change and transform behavior.” According to Ballou, the only solution was “accepting ‘Practical Christianity’ as the guiding principle in all aspects of personal, judicial, and societal life” (97). He also urged that a Christian message of non-violence was needed to end slavery. But other New England abolitionists saw that “moral suasion from the pulpit and the press were doing little to slow down the economic power of the U.S. collective sin,” and they gradually set aside their commitment to non-violence, leaving Ballou an isolated dissenter (114).

Ballou’s alienation looms large in Taylor’s final two chapters. Chapter four explores the conviction that “the United States and its laws” were not “divinely approved by God” which guided Ballou’s unsuccessful attempt to establish a utopian community (131). Hopedale gave Ballou space for theological

exploration, including his experiments with spiritualism. But the community suffered from Ballou's demands as leader. While he promised that its members "could explore and interpret Christianity in virtually any way they chose," Ballou required adherence to standards that "proved too inflexible for many" (135, 140). This same dogmatic inflexibility is central to chapter five, which explores Ballou's commitment to non-violent non-resistance during the Civil War. This was not, Taylor writes, "a call for a legal, physical, or anarchic revolution, but a spiritual revolution to encompass the United States through individual conversions to the principles of non-resistance" (189). It was nevertheless a lonely position, albeit one that drew the attention of Leo Tolstoy, who proclaimed Ballou to be the most important American writer of his day.

Taylor has constructed a rich, nuanced portrait of his subject, one that celebrates Ballou's commitment to principle while acknowledging the clergyman's tendency to be "defensive and even petty" (145). A significant contribution is Taylor's nuanced discussion of the religious press, which was instrumental in the process that "dismembered established churches" (48). Taylor stresses that religious life and thought often developed independent of established denominations. While Nathan O. Hatch and others have made similar claims, Taylor underlines the need to search beyond the "understanding of nineteenth-century Christianity as primarily denominational in nature" (3).

The book's greatest contribution might be one that Taylor does not emphasize; namely, the extent to which Ballou's theological shifts impacted his personal life. When Ballou embraced Universalism, his father "threatened disinheritance" because he "believed his 'favorite son' was 'hopelessly lost'" (53). Likewise, Ballou's rejection of a theological position held by his cousin Hosea went hand-in-hand with a decline in Ballou's "estimation of Hosea's character," leading their "strained relationship" to become "almost irreconcilable" (69, 71). Taylor's analysis of Ballou reminds us that, just as the personal is political, the theological is also personal.

Like other volumes that use an individual to illuminate broader historical circumstances, Taylor's work suffers, at times,

from a possible impulse to serve two audiences. Taylor offers valuable context by charting the world around Ballou, but the book's subject often disappears in these sections. Such absences may suggest that Ballou is less central to the larger story than Taylor wishes. Conversely, Taylor's close analyses of the political and theological controversies in which Ballou participated are informative, but they might prove too granular for readers primarily interested in the wider story.

Perhaps because of these divergent impulses, Taylor's book never fully justifies Tolstoy's assessment of Ballou as a notable figure. Early on, Taylor suggests that one reason why Ballou is not better known is that he was merely "one of many reformers, religious journeymen, preachers, and utopians" of his day (2). This study does not elevate Ballou's significance beyond his being "one of many." Nevertheless, even as a representative example, Adin Ballou is a compelling figure, and Taylor has provided a valuable portrait of Ballou's life, work, and world.

David Mislin, *associate professor at Temple University, is a historian of the nineteenth and twentieth-century United States. He is the author of WASHINGTON GLADDEN'S CHURCH: THE MINISTER WHO MADE MODERN AMERICAN PROTESTANTISM* (2019).

*An Anti-Federalist Constitution: The Development of Dissent in the Ratification Debate.* By Michael J. Faber. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2022. Pp. 536. \$32.50 paperback.)

Of all the challenges Anti-Federalists faced during the ratification contest, perhaps the greatest was the absence of an alternative version of a constitution to offer for state convention delegates and newspaper readers to consider. Had there been an alternative, what might it have looked like? Which parts of the broad Anti-Federalist critique would it have emphasized?

Michael J. Faber's important book "is an effort to rehabilitate the Anti-Federalists" and to "identify and explain [their] ideology" (2). Anti-Federalists had a "clear and coherent" position which, over the course of the debate, "coalesced on a fairly