

The Old Faith in a New Nation

American Protestants and the Christian Past

PAUL J. GUTACKER



Paul Gutacker teaches as part-time Lecturer in History at Baylor University and also serves as executive director of Brazos Fellows, a nine-month residential fellowship based in Waco, TX. Brazos Fellows offers college graduates a year of formation through theological study, spiritual disciplines, vocational

discernment, and life together. Paul holds the PhD in History from Baylor and ThM and MA in Theological Studies from Regent College (Vancouver, B.C.). His research explores the cultural and political importance of nineteenth-century American interpretations of church history. He has published articles and book reviews in *Crux*, *Fides et Historia*, *Church History*, the *Journal of Religion*, the *Journal of Religious History*, and the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*.

Free and open to the public.

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March 13, 2023 | 3pm

Lewis-Birkhead Lecture Hall
(first floor Armstrong Browning Library)

Reception to follow & discounted books available for purchase

Book Description

Conventional wisdom holds that tradition and history meant little to nineteenth-century American Protestants, who relied on common sense and "the Bible alone." The Old Faith in a New Nation challenges this portrayal by recovering evangelical engagement with the Christian past. Even when they appeared to be most scornful toward tradition, most optimistic and forward-looking, and most confident in their grasp of the Bible, evangelicals found themselves returning, time and again, to Christian history. They studied religious historiography, reinterpreted the history of the church, and argued over its implications for the present. Between the Revolution and the Civil War, American Protestants were deeply interested in the meaning of the Christian past.

Paul J. Gutacker draws from hundreds of print sources—sermons, books, speeches, legal arguments, political petitions, and more—to show how ordinary educated Americans remembered and used Christian history. While claiming to rely on the Bible alone, antebellum Protestants frequently turned to the Christian past on questions of import: how should the government relate to religion? Could Catholic immigrants become true Americans? What opportunities and rights should be available to women? To African Americans? Protestants across denominations answered these questions not only with the Bible but also with history. By recovering the ways in which American evangelicals remembered and used Christian history, *The Old Faith in a New Nation* shows how religious memory shaped the nation and interrogates the meaning of "biblicism."