

entrepreneurs were not completely wrong about *D&D*, and in fact role-playing games *can* be interpreted as a type of religious activity that alters a “player’s worldviews in radical and unpredictable ways” (206).

Beyond the history of the moral panic surrounding *D&D*, *Dangerous Games* illustrates the need for the discipline of religious studies to understand the critical role of play in everyday life. *Dangerous Games* maintains that “both religious worldviews and the worlds of fantasy role-playing games are products of a single faculty through which human beings create meaning together” (180). The realization that a game of the imagination can resemble a religion leads to the suspicion that religion, likewise, could just be an imaginative game. Rather than simply dismissing religion, however, Laycock maintains that we need to “take play more seriously. In particular we should pay attention to the frames of meaning in which these constructed realities occur” (283). As *Dangerous Games* illustrates, both religion and play utilize the human ability to step outside the known-world and look back on it from an alternative and more idealized reality. Besides having a critical function, these fantasy worlds are not separate from the world of daily life, and by giving meaning to prosaic reality, can lead to the re-enchantment and the sacralization of everyday life.

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***A Political History of the Bible in America.* By Paul D. Hanson.**

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Paul D. Hanson’s *A Political History of the Bible in America* is not anything if not ambitious. Its goal is nothing less than to provide an interpretative framework that fosters an understanding and appreciation for the role of religion in American political discourse and societal action, a framework capable of channeling “the cacophony of religious beliefs and moral principles that reside in contemporary society into a rich and productive public dialogue” (20). Hanson wishes his readers to understand the important role religion has played, and continues to play, in creating a virtuous and civil society. He pursues this wish by both providing his readers a historical contextualization of religion’s role in general—and the Bible’s role in particular—in American politics, and by offering a theoretical blueprint for

how America's rich and diverse religious pluralism might "reach the goal of cultural blending of moral passion with inclusive civility" (x).

Coming in at nearly seven hundred pages, Hanson's massive tome brings with it a certain magisterial air, born of some forty-five years spent in the scholarly pursuits of research and teaching. Following in the footsteps of such community-oriented theologians as Alasdair MacIntyre and Richard Rorty, Hanson's work exhibits a profound faith in a collective humanity's ability to aim at, and pursue, a better future. It is a book that has a steady, hopeful tone, striking for its lack of scholarly cynicism so common in contemporary academic books.

The book itself is a strange mixture of simplicity and complexity. The simplicity is found in Hanson's incredibly lucid writing style. He has a gift for making complicated ideas understandable. On one level, the book is worth reading if for no other reason than as a model of how to make complex intellectual concepts accessible to a wide audience. The complexity comes in its concepts and intricate, interwoven structure. The book is broken into four basic, constantly dialogical parts: prologue, part one, part two, and an epilogue.

The prologue sets the scene. Hanson wishes to discuss the role of religion in American politics in the past and its constructive role in the future. To do so, he sets forth the idea that a sense of story is absolutely central to understanding how religion, and most specifically the Christian Bible, has been and can be of use in the country's moral discourse and pursuit of civil virtue and harmony. Crucial to this idea of story is the realization that all "personal and public attitudes and actions arise under the identity-shaping influence of stories" (x). The moral stories of religious traditions, when rightly understood and compassionately communicated, can enrich society. Stories dominated by bigotry, hate, and violence diminish society.

The eight chapters of part one provide an overview and analysis of how the Bible and its stories have shaped American political discourse and action. Here Hanson posits that it is from the "Epic" found in the Bible that "the leaders of our nation, from colonial times to the present, and for better or for worse, derived justification for their actions" (x). These chapters examine the Bible's historical role in American politics, from the theocratic model of the early Puritans to the challenges found in the fragmenting interpretative stances and uses of religion and the Bible in the twenty-first century.

Composed of twenty-two chapters, part two offers what Hanson calls the Bible's "theocratic principle," an understanding that "God's sovereignty alone is ultimate" and that all human regimes are transient in comparison (xi). Appreciating this theocratic principle leads to Hanson's central argument, namely that no single authoritative political model arises from the study of the Bible and biblical history. Instead, there are six distinctive models of political government found in the Bible, and these arise in "response to the ever-changing world in which the community of faith lived

and to which it was forced to adjust” (xi). These six models include: charismatic rule, monarchy, prophetic politics, wisdom politics, apocalyptic politics, and New Testament politics. They exist as paradigms within the Bible’s larger epic story, and Hanson sets forth that the development of these six models over a period of thousands of years show that political models always develop “in the realm of the provisional and the ephemeral” and are incredibly dynamic and tuned to specific historic contingencies (xi). Hanson forcefully argues that it is a dire mistake to seek single truths or monolithic political models from the Bible. The Bible’s stories of God and His guiding hand in all human governance are tales of constant change, a dynamism in accord with the answers the Bible offers for how justice and peace might be pursued to help rule and heal a “threatened planet” (127).

The dynamism of the six models explored in part two provide the foundation for Hanson’s epilogue. It is here that Hanson offers a five-step plan for constructive political dialogue and common action. He argues that it is only by taking into account a wide diversity of religious perspectives that constructive political discourse leading to virtuous action can be obtained. No single religious perspective is capable of holding the entirety of God’s truth. Leaders from various religious points of view must seek common ground and clarify attainable common goals in order to find a productive way forward. It is here that one most clearly sees the deeply optimistic character of Hanson’s book, and it is also here that some questions remain unanswered. For what if various voices simply refuse to join with others? (Certain strains of Christian and Islamic fundamentalism come to mind here.) One can only admire a book that works so hard to provide a theoretical blueprint for a “healing of the world,” even if one is forced at the same time to wonder if humans are capable of such comradery in facing the increasingly complex challenges of a world that seems to tend ever more toward fragmentation over unity (640).

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The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History. Edited
by **Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringham.** Urbana:
University of Illinois Press, 2015. x + 217 pp. \$25.00 paper.

In February 2012, as Mitt Romney moved to claim the Republican nomination for President of the United States, a religion professor at Brigham Young University answered questions from a *Washington Post* reporter concerning