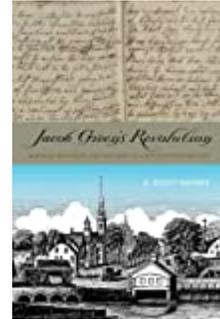


**S. Scott Rohrer.** *Jacob Green's Revolution: Radical Religion and Reform in a Revolutionary Age.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014. 320 pp. \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-271-06422-2; \$79.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-271-06421-5.



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S. Scott Rohrer's *Jacob Green's Revolution: Radical Religion and Reform in a Revolutionary Age* details the life of Jacob Green, a New Englander who rose from humble origins to become a Harvard-educated Presbyterian minister in New Jersey and a prominent advocate for the American Revolution. The book is composed of eleven chapters divided into three parts: a section on Green's development as a pastor and his struggles to provide for his large family, a section on Green's polemical writings and his activities during the revolution, and a section on his later efforts to impose a more radical form of Calvinism on his congregation. Within the sections, each chapter follows a theme, occasionally bouncing backward and forward in time. As an addendum to each chapter, Rohrer provides vignettes on the life of Thomas Bradbury Chandler, an Anglican minister from New Jersey who was a committed loyalist. This juxtaposition highlights how Green's commitment to Calvinism led him to embrace the ideals of the American Revolution.

Born in 1722 and raised in a Congregational household, Green feared for his soul from an early age; his sisters would read aloud descriptions of Judgment Day from *The Day of Doom*. He spent much of the rest of his life struggling with the Calvinist concept of predestination, whether that applied to his own soul or the souls in

his church. Over time, Green adopted a strict interpretation, preventing only but the most visibly pious from becoming members of his church. Following this vision, he ultimately seceded from the Presbyterian Synod of New York and Philadelphia, launching a failed bid to create a more democratic associated presbytery.

By the 1760s, Green began writing religious tracts advocating for stricter standards of church membership along Calvinist lines. In 1776, he involved himself in politics and became the first New Jersey resident to write in favor of independence. This activity likely resulted in his election to New Jersey's Provincial Congress, where he chaired the committee to produce a new constitution. Despite this early position of importance, Green had little interest in a political career and apparently left the capital before the final vote on the constitution with no intention of returning to finish his term. During the revolution, Green supported the patriot cause by publicly shaming loyalists and hosting freed prisoners of war, but also forced his son Ashbel to stay in the militia rather than the regular army, as he was not willing to see his most promising son die for a cause that he had long championed (p. 189).

In the revolutionary years, Green railed against slav-

ery (despite owning a slave himself earlier in life) and involved himself in the debate over inflation during the war. He advocated a controlled depreciation that would protect the interests of the small debtor while reviving the finances of the national government (p. 202). As with his advocacy for independence, Green was prescient in his support; the national government soon adopted a currency policy nearly identical to his proposal.

The book's main strength lies in its exploration of Green's intellectual life. The young minister fell under the influence of many of the colony's leading religious thinkers, including George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards. He wrote prolifically, authoring sermons and publishing both religious and political treatises. Much of the personal detail in the book comes from the diaries of Green and his sons, especially Ashbel, who also became a prominent minister. However, these men had comparatively little to say about their daily activities, so readers looking for lengthy descriptions of Green's personal life will be disappointed.

Rohrer is especially interested in the question of whether Green was a radical or a conservative. When comparing Jacob Green with his son Ashbel, he finds that "Jacob was the radical one," despite their shared values (p. 267). Jacob had pursued ideas on the cutting edge of his own era; however, by the nineteenth century seeking rigorous and godly reform had become a conservative ideal.

Although he did not directly affect Green's life, Thomas Bradbury Chandler appears interspersed throughout the book's narrative. While Green and Chandler both hailed from New England and presided over churches in New Jersey, their life stories diverged. Chandler despised dissenting churches and desired stronger church hierarchy that would reinforce the position of the state. Before the revolution, he became

a strong advocate for bringing an Anglican bishop to America. He fled the country during the revolution, ultimately playing a significant role in convincing the British to place a bishop in Canada. Unfortunately, their lives differed enough that the themes in the chapters on Green's life do not always relate closely to those in the small corresponding sections on Chandler. These vignettes are occasionally brief enough that they leave unanswered questions. For example, Rohrer refers to the general American opposition to having colonial bishops but does not go into detail (this issue is apparently the subject of Rohrer's next book). Problems such as this sometimes lead to a sense that these sections were tacked on rather than included as integral to the book.

Taken as a whole, *Jacob Green's Revolution* provides a good case study of how an early American intellectual dealt with the combined influences of Enlightenment thought and Calvinism at the time of the American Revolution. It would have been useful if Rohrer had put Green and Chandler in a broader comparative perspective. For example, although it is apparent that Green was an important mid-Atlantic author for the patriot cause, it is unclear whether his writings made an impact in the broader scheme of the revolution. Similarly, while Rohrer plays up the role of New Jersey Anglicans as loyalists, he also could have shown how frequently Anglican pastors outside New Jersey remained committed to the British cause. One suspects a similar pattern would not hold in the South. In addition, to benefit a nonspecialist audience, it would have helped to have fuller explanations of key theological concepts, such as Arminianism and antinomianism; Rohrer sometimes appears to assume readers will be familiar with eighteenth-century theological debates. However, these are minor points. The focus of this book is on Green's worldview, rather than his life and times, and Rohrer demonstrates how Green spent his life grappling with the implications of Calvinism.

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