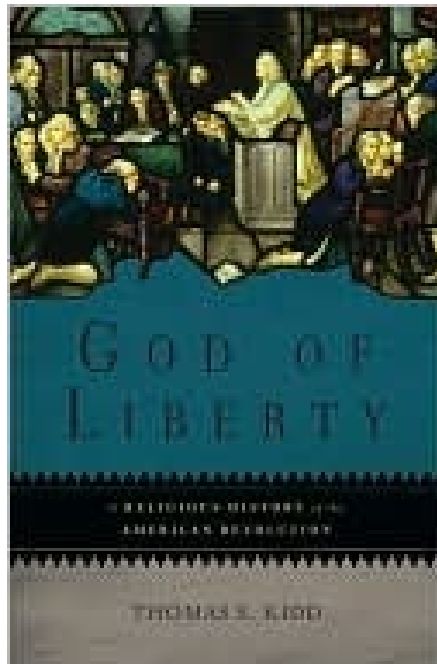




God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution

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Before the Revolutionary War, America was a nation divided by different faiths. But when the war for independence sparked in 1776, colonists united under the banner of religious freedom. Evangelical frontiersmen and Deist intellectuals set aside their differences to defend a belief they shared, the right to worship freely. Inspiring an unlikely but powerful alliance, it was the idea of religious liberty that brought the colonists together in the battle against British tyranny. In *God of Liberty*, historian Thomas S. Kidd argues that the improbable partnership of evangelicals and Deists saw America through the Revolutionary War, the ratification of the Constitution, and the election of Thomas Jefferson in 1800. A thought-provoking reminder of the crucial role religion played in the Revolutionary era, *God of Liberty* represents both a timely appeal for spiritual diversity and a groundbreaking excavation of how faith powered the American Revolution.

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From Reader Review God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution for online ebook

Doug May says

Great read to get a grip on the vital subject of the role of faith in the American founding. There are surprising revelations for the gamut of current political perspectives. The most surprising for me was the continental congressional rejection of the diest Franklin so motion to open in prayer for the reason that they could not agree one a denomination for the clergy . The battle over establishmentarianism is nuanced but in the end it is clear the humanists won out with an assist from the disfavored sects .this ultimate benefitted Jews and catholics as well as evangelicals whoose faith flourished under the , the constitution thenot and now.

Greg Bailey says

God of Liberty was helpful to me in making connections, linking strands in the stew of ideas, events, and personalities during the Revolutionary period that led to the United States as we know it. I learned some new things--the importance of the "Intolerable Acts," for instance--but mostly Kidd helped me gain a clearer picture of what the founders actually believed and why they shaped the new republic as they did. His conclusion--that the prominent place the founders gave to religion was due less to their own theological convictions than to a perceived need for "public virtue"--seems reasonable and accurate to me.

I listened to this book, and I must say that the audiobook is among the poorer ones I have heard. The narrator mispronounced numerous names and words, and spoke in an odd, clipped cadence. I think I would have enjoyed the print book more.

Tim says

From the blurbs (esp. Noll, Stout, and Marsden) I expected more of this book. Yes, it provides a history of religion and the American Revolution. It is not exactly a synthesis, primary sources heavily outweigh other secondary texts in his footnotes, and it does not do much to offer a comprehensive argument beyond evangelicals and rationalists came together to create American religious freedoms and the beginnings of American civil religion. The first argument is much better described than the latter, which seems to be asserted at the beginning and the end. The book is well researched (at least among primary sources), but is not vigorously argued. The book's individual chapters seem to be discrete arguments/descriptions and not part of one larger or continuous argument (beyond maybe, yep, religion was involved). You get details throughout, but the forest of larger, overarching narrative is lost to the trees of specific examples. So useful and interesting, but not definitive or revelation.

Gabrielle says

Some of the chapters are organized in a way that I found haphazard. Others (chapter 9 on the Constitution) were fabulous.

John says

This is an excellent book examining the role Christians played leading up to, through, and after the American Revolution. Kidd shows how Christians thought, prayed, and preached in the era. He examines the historical record to understand the role of public religion in the shaping of American government. I was fascinated by the way pastors confused issues in the spiritual realm with those of the civil realm. Pastors of the era seemingly saw the dawn of the American experiment as a harbinger of the millennium, as well as silly conspiracy theories about Catholics and "Popery."

"The more things change, the more they stay the same." Christians have a tendency to confuse spiritual and political matters--salvation, freedom, liberty, and equality. This was rampant during the revolutionary era, and it remains so in ours. Reading about another era can help enlighten our own and give a greater understanding to how a Christian should live in a free society.

This is an important book--one more people should read.

Jason Walker says

In this day we often think of all Christians being a unified voting block that will go conservative. In the time of the Revolution religious difference was denominational and it was important and it defined how charters for colonies had been written. This book pulls together a lot of disparate histories and gives the reader a good entry into understanding just how complex the history of this country is and why the short sighted politicians of today just don't stack up against those statesmen and women we had previously.

Michael Connolly says

I just finished reading a book I would highly recommend to anyone who cherishes democracy. God of Liberty written by Thomas Kidd, a professor at Baylor University, recounts the significant role that religion played in uniting colonists during the American Revolution of 1775 and in the subsequent formation of American democracy.

Although America was a nation of many religious persuasions, (i.e. Baptists, Calvinists, Presbyterians, Quakers, Deists Unitarians, Episcopalians), five religious ideas connected Americans of different religious persuasions in pursuing liberty and independence.

1. The disestablishment of state churches a movement that promoted the idea of the separation of church and state
2. The idea that God was the guarantor of fundamental human rights: "We hold these rights to be self-evident that all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights"
—Declaration of Independence
3. The threat to states, institutions and community posed by human sinfulness
4. That conviction that a republic needed to be sustained by public virtue and that in the absence of public virtue anarchy would ensure which would lead to the rise of an autocrat.
5. The belief that God—or Providence—moved in and through nations

Reading this book, I was reminded of the Founding Fathers' conviction that only if a nation's citizens and its leaders embraced public virtue could a nation hope to preserve good government. Public virtue included

honesty, self-sacrifice, and good will towards others. Our Founding Fathers' believed that religion provided the foundation on which public virtue was built.

"Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness—these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. ...and let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion." George Washington's Farewell Address 1796

Bea says

FYI - I heard Thomas Kidd speak about this book, and requested that our public library purchase a copy.

Here is his presentation....

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6piB8E...>

I've just begun reading GOD OF LIBERTY. So glad to learn more about "The Great Awakening" that led to the concept of "separation of church and state" See also - <http://www.great-awakening.com/>

Here's another "good read" that provides perspective on this time period.

A GREAT AND NOBLE SCHEME

The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from their American Homeland

by John Mack Faragher

Copyright 2005

Andrea says

Superb. If you are a geezer like me (a baby boomer), you learned a lot of this in school. If you are a Gen Xer, Y, or millennial, you probably haven't heard this and need to.

The book discusses the religious background of the American Founders and their age. Uniquely, in the American colonies, evangelical Christians and Enlightenment Deists (Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Franklin, Madison), made common cause in advocating for disestablishment of religion, in their common belief that the Creator of all wants liberty and freedom of conscience for humankind. The Founders wanted--and gave us--a secular government, but NOT a secular populace or secular society. Quite the opposite, They believed that in the absence of a powerful state, the populace must have internal sources of virtue and restraint, and that **only** religion can provide that. Examples abound: Washington insisted on chaplains in his army regiments, Adams urged prayers and fasting for victory, Franklin the skeptic said that only if we maintain our virtue and morality will God give the Americans a victory. Adams (a Unitarian) called America the "Christian Sparta," Washington's Farewell address called religion "indispensable" to political prosperity/Religion must be "protected" but not "established," government must not be hostile to religious institutions, but require no religious test.

So today the Founders could well be considered religious fanatics, bigots, or worse. Today's evangelicals might find their forerunners too lenient. The final chapter, outlining de Tocqueville's observations of

America circa 1830 is simply wonderful to read. Religion gives liberty its moral purpose, precluding the descent into Terror that contemporaneous France underwent. There is much more, including discussion of the Revolution's one great moral failure--you know what it is. Read this book to enlighten your mind. They weren't just a bunch of "dead white men" with nothing to teach us.

Michael says

Our national history is complex. In this work, Thomas Kidd unpacks the nuances of religion and its relationship with liberty and the birth of America. Kidd does a nice job of giving an understanding of pre-rev religion and post rev, and the difference made by the Great Awakening. Where our founders Christians? What were their beliefs? How did these beliefs contribute to their actions? Kidd answers. Bear in mind, this isn't some blind, evangelical cheerleading session led by a popular pseudo scholar. Kidd does a great job of giving the reality of the religious landscape of those years.

Brian says

"One of the greatest accomplishments of the American Revolution was the ingenious balance between religious liberty and religious strength." (p. 256)

Adam Shields says

Short review: This is a good supplement to revolutionary history. Thomas Kidd is particularly paying attention to religious history here. I just finished reading Mark Noll's *In the Beginning Was the Word*, which is particularly a history of how scripture was used in North America from 1492 until 1783. The two books are helpful together. Kidd is showing the broader history, Noll is showing the more particular use of scripture and how that effected the colonial self understanding and how that compared to British scripture uses.

My full review is on my blog at <http://bookwi.se/god-of-liberty/>

Bob says

If the relationship between religion and our national life in the U.S. were a Facebook status, it would be "it's complicated". Truth is, it always has been, according to Thomas S. Kidd.

In this "religious history of the American Revolution" Kidd gives us a highly readable yet nuanced account of our early religious history which avoids either the "Christian America" or "secular state" options. Nothing illustrates this more than the relationship between Baptist evangelist, John Leland and Thomas Jefferson. These were strange bedfellows to be sure and yet both were agreed on one crucial issue, the disestablishment of religion and the promotion of religious liberty for all Americans.

Kidd documents that this passion for liberty, first from the British establishment, and then from any establishment of a particular church was in fact the meeting place between much of the evangelical movement that arose out of the first Great Awakening, and the by and large Unitarian deists and skeptics

who were among many of our "Founding Fathers". Both recognized the vital importance of religion in energizing the rebellion against Great Britain, which accounted for the wide support of military chaplains during the war. Both recognized the importance of religion for the encouragement of sacrifice and public virtue. And both opposed state supported churches that privileged one denomination with tax revenues, and often excluded from public office those unwilling to meet religious tests.

The book also chronicles the fateful concurrence particularly between New England religious leaders and Thomas Jefferson in the statement in our Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal, that they endowed by their Creator with certain Unalienable rights". Intended to assert American equality with the British, it also underscored the deep inconsistency within our country of oppressing Native Americans and enslaving Africans. Kidd explores how this piece of our religious history set up a tension not only between sections of the country but even within the lives of people like Jefferson who both trembled at the consequences of slavery for the country and yet held slaves until he died.

What Kidd argues is that the evidence of these early years presents a picture of public expression of religious faith without state establishment of religious institutions. None envisioned the complete exclusion of matters of faith from public life. In fact, the disestablishment of religion was believed to be a vitalizing factor that even contributed to subsequent religious awakenings and the exceptional vibrancy of religion in American life, a fact noted by de Tocqueville. He sums up the agreement between the evangelicals and the founders as follows, "The founders' religious agreement was on public values, not private doctrines" (p. 254). He warns against things like divine providentialism supporting every conceivable conflict and the kinds of "Christian America" rhetoric seen in some quarters today. Yet none of this argues against the importance of religion in public life, particularly to advance commonly held values.

The only reservation I have here is that this can sometimes smack of a pragmatism that uses religious faith for political ends. While people of faith should be welcomed in public life and discourse, they also need to be watchful for being used (and duped) for political ends inconsistent with their most deeply held principles.

Jon Amos says

Evangelicalism is currently experiencing an identity crisis. If there was ever a time where a book such as this was needed, it is now. With diligent research and clarity of thought, Thomas Kidd gives us a comprehensive overview of the complex relationship between Christianity and the American Revolution. In doing so, he provides a solid foundation for both the religious and the secular to understand the role of religion in American Democracy while offering historical analysis of its benefits and its dangers.

Mr. V says

I found it to be very informative and learned about how religious groups changed from the initial colonization up to and after the revolution. The first few chapters were a hard read but as the book went on the writing improved greatly.
