

[*Under God: George Washington and the Question of Church and State*, Tara Ross & Joseph C. Smith Jr., Spence Publishing, 317 pages]

## Faith of Our Father

By James P. Pinkerton

THE MOST REFRESHING thing about *Under God: George Washington and the Question of Church and State* is what is not found in its 317 pages. The foreign-born big names, many of whom never set foot in this country—but who are somehow presumed to know best by the American conservative intelligentsia—are all given a sabbatical by authors Tara Ross and Joseph C. Smith Jr.

Let's say, for the record, that Aquinas, Smith, Burke, von Mises, Hayek, Rand, and Strauss were mostly a fine bunch. But let's also note that many rightist scribblers today feel obligated—or inspired or peer-pressured or tenure-constrained—to leave textual offerings at the altar of foreign “greats” who were mostly oblivious to the key components of American exceptionalism.

Can't Americans have a scholarly book that explains the American political tradition in the voice of an American? Especially an American such as our first president, a man who combined words and deeds in ways that have so instructed and enlightened us?

And for those who like a debate, well, Americans can provide that, too. Thomas Jefferson, for example, had ideas very different from Washington about religion—even if, as we shall see, the differences have been greatly exaggerated in the centuries since.

In their own time, Washington and the Founders were mindful of their heritage and their history, but they were even more aware that they were creating something new—*novus ordo seclorum*, as it says on the dollar bill. In fact, these new Americans did a good job establish-

ing a mostly conservative self-governing republic that flourished before many of the most revered conservative luminaries were even born or had learned to say “United States of America” in English.

And nobody was more influential in early America than George Washington. He was perfectly articulate and persuasive to his fellow citizens, even though he never went to college, let alone grad school—an enduring source of inspiration, no doubt, to today's homeschoolers.

Of course, Washington and the Founders did have help. Let's not forget that other Latin motto on the reverse of the dollar bill, *annuit coeptis* “He has approved of our undertaking.”

But it's the real George Washington, the Washington of public and private faith, that historians have mostly not approved of. Authors Ross and Smith—lawyers in Dallas and Denver respectively—call attention to the obvious bias in *The Writings of George Washington From the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, edited by John C. Fitzpatrick, completed in 1944, which fails to include many of Washington's letters to religious organizations. Even Washington's 1790 letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, R.I., a strong vindication of religious freedom written before the First Amendment was ratified, was buried deep in a footnote. Yet in that correspondence, the new president reminded American Jews that, in this new country, toleration was not an “indulgence” for the lucky or the connected but one of those “inherent natural rights” that patriots had died for. He also made plain that freedom for diverse religious practice is not to be confused with freedom from religious expression by public officials. And so the president closed his letter with an invocation to the Judeo-Christian God: “May the father of all mercies scatter light, and not darkness, upon our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in His own due time and way everlastingly happy.”

The authors tell us that the public Washington was more religious than the private Washington. In private, for

example, he never referred to “Jesus” or “Jesus Christ” nor used such synonyms as “savior” or “redeemer.” They add, “There must have been some measure of deliberateness in his decisions to be publicly religious.”

So was Washington a Deist? A hypocrite? The authors don't claim to analyze his soul or psyche, but they remind us that Washington was, purely and simply, a public servant, who declared, “Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair, the rest is in the hands of God.”

Washington was definitely a man of faith. In 1755, during the French and Indian War, he was part of a military unit, led by British general Edward Braddock, which was mostly annihilated near Fort Duquesne. Washington survived—a miracle, and he knew it. As he wrote to his brother, John, “I am still in the land of the living by the miraculous care of Providence, that protected me beyond all human expectation; I had 4 Bullets through my coat, and two Horses shot under me yet escaped unhurt.”

Washington's faith became more public during the next phase of his career, as a member of Virginia's House of Burgesses. In 1774, after the British government retaliated for the Boston Tea Party by shutting down the Port of Boston, the Virginia legislature protested the British action, calling for a “day of Fasting, Humiliation, and Prayer, devoutly to implore the divine interposition, for averting the heavy Calamity which threatens Destruction to our civil Rights, and the Evils of civil War.” For his part, Washington not only voted for this resolution, but was also, according to a biographer, “determined to respect it literally and in spirit.”

The American commander kept the faith throughout the American Revolution. After one success in 1776, he reminded his subordinates that they should always be “remembering that upon the blessing of Heaven, and the bravery of the men, our Country only can be saved.” And so it was a no-brainer for General Washington to

endorse paid chaplains for the troops. In the words of an historian cited by the authors, “Washington seems never during his life to have questioned the relevance of organized religion to social order and morality .... He looked upon religion as indispensable to the morale, discipline, and good conduct of the men under his command.”

Toward the end of the fighting, on Feb. 15, 1783, Washington issued this general order: “The Brigadiers and Commandants of Brigades [are] desired to give notice in their orders and to afford every aid and assistance in their power

ACUTELY CONSCIOUS THAT **HIS EVERY GESTURE AND WORD WOULD BE SETTING A PRECEDENT FOR THE INFANT REPUBLIC, WASHINGTON BOWED TO KISS THE BIBLE ON WHICH HE SWORE HIS OATH OF OFFICE.**

for the promotion of that public Homage and adoration which are due to the supreme being, who has through his infinite goodness brought our public Calamities and dangers ... very near to a happy conclusion.”

Nothing changed when Washington became president. Acutely conscious that his every gesture and word would be setting a precedent for the infant republic, he bowed to kiss the Bible on which he swore his oath of office. In his inaugural address, Washington noted the great challenges facing the country, adding, “It would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official act, my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the Universe, who presides in the Council of Nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that his benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the People of the United States.” The point was made: Washington did not insist that every American had to share his own public faith, but he did make clear that America’s public life would be full of shared faith.

At the same time, however, the new president continued to peel back special legal privileges for religion inher-

ited from Europe. In 1790, he signed a law eliminating ecclesiastic jurisdiction over certain legal matters; as the authors explain, he was happy to strip away an “ancient form of clerical privilege from use in Federal jurisprudence.” In other words, there would be plenty of religion in American life, but no official religion.

The following year, the states ratified the First Amendment, which declared, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” President Washington had no objection to these

words; as Ross and Smith explain, “Washington’s actions over the course of the next five years would demonstrate his view that the amendment did not change the propriety of the national government’s support for certain religious activity.” For example, in his 1796 Farewell Address, the president summed up his view of the non-separation of church and state:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports .... Let it simply be asked: Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

In other words, Jews could keep their distinct faith, Quakers could keep theirs—during the Revolutionary War, Washington defended the right of Quakers to be pacifists—but America, overall, would keep a public faith.

How then did Thomas Jefferson’s idea of a “wall of separation between Church & State” come to be seen by so many today as the “Constitutional” doctrine that should chase faith out of the public square altogether? That’s an interesting question, mostly outside the scope of this book. But the authors note that Jefferson’s words, expressed in a single letter to the Danbury Baptists, dated Jan. 1, 1802, were not anywhere close to what the American Civil Liberties Union would purport them to be.

The authors further add that Jefferson used those words only once in his life, in part because the phrase was poorly received; even the recipients didn’t like the message. Ross and Shaw explain: “As a religious minority, the Danbury Baptists sought a government that respected freedom of conscience, of course, but they did not want a government that was *opposed to religion*.”

Still, as we all know, various liberals and litigators have acted as if Jefferson’s single utterance outweighed the vast volume of counter-thinking that long preceded the Danbury letter. The authors conclude, “Washington’s opinions deserve at least as much attention as those of Jefferson.”

Well, yes, indeed they do. Because, as Jefferson himself put it, when confronted with challenges, Americans don’t need new ideas; they must instead rediscover the American mind. Ross and Smith have helped us to do just that, starting with one of greatest American minds, that of the eternal George Washington. ■

*James P. Pinkerton is a contributor to the Fox News Channel and a fellow at the New America Foundation in Washington, D.C. He served in the White House under Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush.*

# Don't Sweat the TSA

Has anyone noticed that the various “anti-terror” measures we see everywhere are just security theater—that is, utterly ineffective for their purported purpose and

staged for political reasons?

On Washington's subway, the PA system admonishes passengers over and over to watch each other and report any unusual behavior to Metro personnel. “Let's be prepared, not scared,” the recording says, the phrase sounding as if bought from an ad agency. We are to watch for unattended parcels and so on. Nobody, of course, pays the slightest attention.

This mummerly of watchfulness sounds like a security measure but isn't. Report strange behavior on an urban subway? At 1 a.m.? You see paranoid schizos talking with their little voices, swarthy men speaking unknown languages, bearded young wearing Che T-shirts. Any terrorist not still in a garage band would of course be careful to look normal. They are not stupid.

At rush hour, when a terrorist would strike, the system is a madhouse. Suppose that in a jammed car of irritated people you see someone “behaving strangely.” You get off at the next stop and find a guard, by which time the train has left. You tell him, “Hey, I saw someone strange.” “What do you mean, strange?” he asks. “Well, he kept kind of looking around, and I think he was sweating.”

What does the guard do? Sound an alarm, shut down the Metro, and call in SWAT teams to look for a sweating guy? Hardly. He will brush you off.

Report unattended packages at rush hour? Oh sure, that will work. Upon seeing the orphaned briefcase, do you

shriek “Bomb!” in a packed car, whereupon three people are crushed to death in the panic, the system shuts down, and you go to jail when the explosive turns out to be a bag lunch and a report on locust infestations in Chad?

Of course, any terrorist with a solitary functioning neuron would use a three-minute fuse so that when his bomb went off between Rosslyn and Pentagon Station he would be walking down Wilson Boulevard.

This comedy never stops. I recently read that police armed with “machine guns”—presumably meaning submachine guns—will patrol the subway system of New York. What could be a better idea? Half-trained rentacops opening up with automatic weapons in a rush-hour mob. At what? Someone acting strangely? Sweating, maybe? Automatic weapons are totally useless against suicide bombers or package-leavers. What then are they for?

I see that Amtrak stations on the D.C.-NYC corridor will shortly be visited without notice by teams that will randomly search waiting passengers. Oh, splendid. It's rush hour. Thousands jam the station. Let's assume our clowns search 2 percent of these people. The terrorist has one chance in 50 of being caught. How appallingly secure.

The funniest part is this: if a passenger refuses to be searched, his ticket will be refunded and he will have to leave the station. This ensures that a terrorist won't be caught. He will simply go to the next station and... boom.

Most of the security at airports is equally pointless. Today everybody knows that if you buy a one-way ticket, you will be hassled endlessly by marginally competent TSA Nazis amazed that people actually have to pay attention to them. Any terrorist will have a roundtrip ticket, but if you fly to Boston to take a job, you will be bullied unmercifully.

Baggage is not inspected for explosives until after the passenger has entered a crowded terminal. For purposes of getting publicity and shutting down the airlines, a terminal is as good a target as a plane. And so on.

No, I'm not giving ideas to terrorists. Everything I've said is obvious. Ask any sophomore in high school.

What then are the reasons behind all of this? Two are money and turf. Homeland Security is now a huge agency providing lots of jobs for air marshals, security screeners, and bureaucrats. It also hands out fortunes to companies that design explosives-sniffers and X-ray machines. It is a bonanza. The trough is open for business.

But those at the top are smart enough to know that this is only theater. What is the underlying purpose? To frighten the public into supporting the president's wars?

Or is the aim, as the more paranoid have it, to train the public to accept unrestrained police powers? If so, it is working. We now know better than to question the attitude of a TSA goon as we will miss our flight—something they know and use.

Everything about you is now the business of Homeland Security, and there is no recourse. Carry a book on the Taliban in your carry-on luggage? God help you. ■