

God of Liberty Book Review

Taylor Brandon

Department of Christian Studies

History 211: History of the United States

Dr. Patrick Connelly

October 1, 2024

God of Liberty by Thomas Kidd takes us through the American revolution in a way that is different than many ways that we have learned. Kidd shows us how the Lord was with the people of the revolution and guides us throughout the time. As Kidd guides us through the years of the American revolution, we shift between all the key events of the revolution. We see how the Lord truly shaped the opinions and feelings of all during the time of the revolutionary war. Throughout this book one of Kidd's main point is how we have created a sense of national identity. Our national identity is how we are looked at as a nation and how we strive to grow. The same ideas our founding fathers had are very similar to the ideas that we have now to learn by.

Although many typically skip over the introduction when it comes to book, I decided to dive into it. The title of the introduction, Rebellion of the Tyrants really sets a scene for the reader. Kidd opens with a story from one of the first actions of the revolutionary war. An evangelical Chaplin, David Avery. Avery witnessed many key moments in many battles of the American Revolution. He even lost a friend; however, he begins to talk about how the Lord was still in the mist, "Yet Avery came to see the British army's costly victory at Bunker Hill as a sign of divine favor for the Patriots. God, Avery averred, "was our Rock and fortress: he covered our heads with a helmet of salvation"." Kidd writes on page 2 of the Introduction. Avery soon left his congregation to help with the Patriot cause because he was so compelled by the work of Lord during the war. Many Americans wondered if it was truly God that helped during the war and led them to freedom from the mother country, however this dying question and conflict brought Americans together. "The conflict summoned Americans to support God's sacred cause of Liberty" Kidd writes on Page 4. It was not just the traditional and evangelical Christians that felt this way about the war but even the founding fathers of our nation too. John Leland, a Baptist

evangelist, gifted Thomas Jefferson and block of cheese. The “mammoth cheese” was to honor the president’s republicanism and support to religious freedom. Although Jefferson was far from an evangelical Christian, he supported the people’s right to religious freedom. “The fervent evangelical both believed that government should afford liberty of conscience to its citizens and should not privilege one Christian denomination over another.” Kidd writes on Page 5. The American people began to realize that there was only reason for them winning the battles and it was because of the Lord. They saw it and went after it. They dropped all grudges and disagreement about other religions and came to realize that their love for the Lord is what unified them. “The Public spirituality shared by the revolutionary era’s evangelicals, mainstream Christians, liberal rationalist, and deist established many Americas’ most cherished freedoms. God of Liberty will explore those principles of public spirituality and their essential connection to the success of American civil society.” Kidd writes on page 6.

In the first chapter, Kidd describes the vast number of religious beliefs in colonial America. With the religious diversity at the time, we see how the mindset of revolutionary’s changes over the years. The complexity of religion and politics helps build up the religious landscape of the colonies. The Enlightenment played a huge part in the religious diversity of the colonial era. Kidd however argues that the Great Awakening also played a crucial role in shaping the revolution and promoting religious freedom and questioning the authority that the mother country had on the colonies. Kidd also describes how religious leaders felt about the religious landscaping. “The great awakening also stoked the belief of many Americans that religious signs portended major changes, including massive numbers of conversions, transformative political events, or both.” Kidd says on Page 25. I find it interesting how Kidd goes in depth on the great awakening delt widely Catholicism in the states and the religious freedom the colonist has grew.

Liberty in the colonies away from the mother country was not the only freedom that the colonist longed for. Colonist created an identity for themselves through the religious revolution. Through this identity, Kidd helps set the scene for the rest of the book on our American identity is based on our freedom religiously and politically.

Chapter one leads straight into chapter 2 'The sacred property of every man'. Kidd goes in depth about religion during the American Revolution. Kidd writes about how faith has truly influenced the revolution. Britain has major conflict with the colonies because of their divine calling. Britain had major conflict with the colonies because of the religious separation and diversity in the colonies. "In the medieval period, Europeans had simply assumed that a union between the church and state, and the persecution of those who challenged it, was a natural, even God-sanctioned state of affairs." Kidd says on Page 39. He father's this by writing, "The law changed somewhat in 1689, when Britain adopted the celebrated Act of Toleration, a law that should have freed dissenters from state persecution." (Page 39). Kidd writes this to draw a fine line of how Europe, especially Britain when it came to religious diversity. I found it interesting how Kidd says, "somewhat" when writing about the Acts of Toleration. The Acts of toleration did not protect the Catholics and atheist, who continued to face discrimination. The support and key figures such as, Anne Hutchison, and movements for the support of independence in the colonies. Kidd describes different denomination and how the perspectives shaped the how Britain responded. I enjoyed this chapter because of how the different perspective Kidd gives. Seeing how Britain responded to the US and how it ties in with religion.

Throughout the next four chapters Kidd takes us through political context and leaders during the revolutionary period and post-revolutionary period. Kidd takes us through the ideas of revolutionaries and religious freedom. These chapters highlight the complexity of religion and

politics relationship during the revolutionary period. The American revolution has a significant role in how the faith played a role in shaping concepts of liberty governance.

Kidd takes us straight into how politics in America and how they have affected social issues based on religion. Evangelical Christians emerged and the second great awakening led to a heavy impact on the social principles of the period. Specifically, its heavy impact on the constitution. Kidd analyzed the debates around The US constitution when it comes to religion in government. The arguments about incorporation of religious language and principles and how our Founding fathers desired to have a secular government. Kidd also goes in depth about slavery in chapter 7. Kidd writes, “For many African Americans, the creed of human equality only made more bitter the disappointment and suffering of the revolutionary era. America would sweep onward toward the bloody Civil War that would wreck Jefferson’s self-contradictory republic of white equality and black bondage. The underlying impetus toward this grievous end was the inexorable logic of equality by creation.” I honestly loved this quote and I believe that Kidd is right. For African American the Revolution didn’t help them at all. Many believe that it honestly created more problems. Jefferson contradictory statements also segway into how we as a nation have viewed slavery. I enjoyed how Kidd made the connection between the relationship between society and religion with politics. It brings us our sense of identity that we have now.

Kidd takes us straight into his next point of American identity in chapter 10,11, and 12. America is based on the story “city upon a hill”, which pushes the belief that the nation is unique when it comes to liberty and democracy. Kidd further explains that the civil war created a divide between the religious communities of America. He discusses the role of faith that motivated soldiers and abolitionist. Kidd also brings our attention to how the revolutionary war became a powerful tool for fighting for independence. Kidd focuses in on George Whitefield for his

support for the revolutionary war through religion. Kidd really takes a stance that focuses on how religion was such a powerful tool for revolutionaries. He also brings us to present day and how the decisions and religion have truly affected us and our country's identity. Kidd discusses in chapter 12 the election of 1800 and religious liberty. Kidd describes this election as "as a real revolution in the principles of our government as that of 1776 was in its form" on page 229. Chapter 12. Jefferson's presidency was a major turning point for Americans because Jefferson was not religious. How this was viewed by Americans was different. Kidd writes on page 2538, "Many traditional and evangelical believers regarded Jefferson's election as a victory not for irreligion but for religious freedom." For many in the states even though Jefferson didn't believe in a higher power, he still supported the division between different believers. He also contributed to why now we can all have religious freedom. On page 229 Kidd writes, "These believers, like many other religious minorities in America, saw the new president as their deliver from oppression, his personal beliefs notwithstanding." These chapters show us how complex the religion and American political ideas are and their role in shaping our country's history.

God of Liberty takes us through a compelling story of religion and the growth of the United States. Kidd gives us historical evidence and movements to show how faith has truly been at the forefront of many decisions we have made as a nation. The work of evangelical Christians during the colonial period fixed our view and created challenges for us as a nation and grew our national identity. Kidd challenges the readers to think about how the role of religion played a huge role in America. By presenting it in social issues and political, Kidd brings us to think about how the American revolution challenged our faith and brought the nation closer to God. God of Liberty shows how significant religious beliefs helped shape our nation's national identity and create a nation that we now live in and continue to create.

References:

- 1.) “Yet Avery came to see the British army’s costly victory at Bunker Hill as a sign of divine favor for the Patriots. God, Avery averred, “was our Rock and fortress: he covered our heads with a helmet of salvation”.” Kidd, Page 2, Introduction
- 2.) . “The conflict summoned Americans to support God’s sacred cause of Liberty. Kidd, Page 4, Introduction.
- 3.) “The fervent evangelical both believed that government should afford liberty of conscience to its citizens and should not privilege one Christian denomination over another.” Kidd, Page 5, Introduction.
- 4.) “The Public spirituality shared by the revolutionary era’s evangelicals, mainstream Christians, liberal rationalist, and deist established many Americas’ most cherished freedoms. God of Liberty will explore those principles of public spirituality and their essential connection to the success of American civil society. Kidd, Page 6, Introduction.
- 5.) . “The great awakening also stoked the belief of many Americans that religious signs portended major changes, including massive numbers of conversions, transformative political events, or both.” Kidd says. Kidd, Page 25, Chapter 1.
- 6.) In the medieval period, Europeans had simply assumed that a union between the church and state, and the persecution of those who challenged it, was a natural, even God-sanctioned situation.”. Kidd, Page 39, Chapter 2.

- 7.) “The law changed somewhat in 1689, when Britain adopted the celebrated Act of Toleration, a law that should have freed dissenters from state persecution.” Kidd, Page 39, Chapter 2
- 8.) “For many African Americans, the creed of human equality only made more bitter the disappointment and suffering of the revolutionary era. America would sweep onward toward the bloody Civil War that would wreck Jefferson’s self-contradictory republic of white equality and black bondage. The underlying impetus toward this grievous end was the inexorable logic of equality by creation.” Kidd, Page 146, Chapter 7.
- 9.) “Many traditional and evangelical believer regarded Jefferson’s election as a victory not for irreligion but for religious freedom.” Kidd, Page 238, Chapter 12
- 10.) “These believers, like many other religious minorities in America, saw the new president as their deliver from oppression, his personal beliefs notwithstanding.” Kidd Page 229, Chapter 12.