

Was George Washington a Christian Nationalist?

Read Time: 4 Minutes, 45 Seconds

“The Miami Herald” recently published an editorial accusing Governor Ron DeSantis of “flirting with Christian nationalism” because he utilized a biblical metaphor about “putting on the whole armor of God” during a speech at Hillsdale College. If the editors of “The Miami Herald” were so triggered by the governor’s passing allusion to Ephesians 6:11, heaven only knows how they would have reacted to George Washington.

The term “Christian nationalism” is relatively new and is generally defined as “the attempt to merge Christian and American identities and thereby distorting both the Christian faith and America’s constitutional democracy.” Ironically, those who use it most seem to have little understanding of either the Christian faith or America’s constitutional democracy.

Consider George Washington

Upon taking command of the Colonial American Army in May of 1775, George Washington issued an order stating that each day was to begin with prayer led by the officers of each unit. He did this because he knew that without God’s blessing and favor, the Americans had no chance of defeating the mighty British war machine.

For the same reason, he also ordered that, unless their duties required them to be elsewhere, every soldier was to observe “a punctual attendance of Divine services, to implore the blessing of heaven upon the means used for our safety and public defense.” He also forbade profanity, swearing, gambling and drunkenness and expressed his desire that, “Every officer and man will endeavor so as to live and act as becomes a

Christian soldier” (Hyatt, “1726: The Year that Defined America,” 114).

Against insurmountable odds, Washington led the ragtag American army to victory over the British. On the same day that General Cornwallis surrendered his entire force to him, Washington appointed an army chaplain, Rev. Israel Evans, to deliver a sermon to the troops. A massive crowd joined the assembled troops and Evans exhorted them all to give thanks to God, knowing their victory over the British was not the result of their own prowess and strength.

Washington later sent a letter, dated June 14, 1783, to the governors of the various states in which he urged them to make Jesus their role model for life. He exhorted that we ought to:

“Demean ourselves with that charity, humility and pacific temper of mind, which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion, and without a humble imitation of His example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy nation” (Hyatt, “1726: The Year that Defined America,” 120).

What They Banned

It is obvious that Washington had no thought of banning expressions of faith from the public square. The same is true of all the Founders. What they banned in America was an official, state church like the nations of Europe.

In England, for example, the Anglican Church was the official state church and all others, such as the Pilgrims, were harassed, jailed and exiled. In Germany, Lutheranism was the official state church, and all others were banned. In Italy and other European nations, Roman Catholicism was the state church and all other expressions of faith were forbidden.

Washington, by contrast, envisioned America as a land where there would be a free and open marketplace of religious ideas

and expressions without government interference. This was the vision of all the Founders, which is why they instituted the First Amendment, which reads, "Congress shall make no law concerning the establishment of religion, nor hindering the free exercise thereof."

The Big Lie

One of the biggest lies of America's history is that the First Amendment secularized the American system of government and banned expressions of faith from government institutions. If that were the case, Washington and the other Founders never got the memo.

Washington, for example, insisted on taking the first presidential oath of office with his hand on a Bible. Then, in his inaugural address, which was filled with references to God and the Bible, he declared:

"The propitious smiles of heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of right and order that heaven itself has ordained" (Hyatt, "Pilgrims and Patriots 2nd Edition," 175).

After the swearing-in ceremony, Washington and Congress proceeded to St. Paul's Chapel for a worship service.

Neither Washington nor any Founder wanted to impose a particular church or sect on others. However, they all believed that only Christianity provided the intellectual and moral underpinnings for a stable and prosperous society. They, therefore, welcomed its influence everywhere. This is the basis on which John Adams, in a 1798 speech, declared:

"We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religionOur Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other" (Hyatt, "1726: The Year that Defined America," 168).

The phrase, “wall of separation,” which is often used by those on the political Left, is not in the U.S. Constitution. It was used by Thomas Jefferson in a letter to a group of Baptists in which he referred them to the First Amendment and assured them that it guaranteed that they would not be persecuted for their faith as had been the case in the Old World. Jefferson’s “wall of separation” was obviously unilateral, in place to protect people of faith from the government, not to protect the government from people of faith.

The Conclusion of the Matter

The Miami Herald’s response to Governor DeSantis’s quote of a Biblical passage is indictive of the hostility that has arisen in modern American culture toward people of faith. America’s Founders held no such hostility. Instead, they affirmed people and expressions of faith. The noted Catholic scholar, the late Michael Novak, was correct when he said,

“Far from having a hostility toward religion, the Founders counted on religion [Christianity] for the underlying philosophy of the republic, its supporting ethic and its reliable source of rejuvenation” (Hyatt, “1726: The Year that Defined America,” 171).

This is why I and thousands of others are praying for another Great Awakening to sweep across the land, rejuvenating the faith of individuals and revitalizing the churches of America. Another such Awakening is the only hope for America.

If George Washington were here, he would surely say, “I approve this message!” {eo}

This article was derived from the book, “1726: The Year that Defined America,” which documents the impact of the Great Awakening on both the founding of America and the ending of slavery on this continent. It is available from Amazon and Dr. Eddie Hyatt’s website at .

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