



American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation

By Jon Meacham

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The American Gospel—literally, the good news about America—is that religion shapes our public life without controlling it. In this vivid book, New York Times bestselling author Jon Meacham tells the human story of how the Founding Fathers viewed faith, and how they ultimately created a nation in which belief in God is a matter of choice.

At a time when our country seems divided by extremism, American Gospel draws on the past to offer a new perspective. Meacham re-creates the fascinating history of a nation grappling with religion and politics—from John Winthrop’s “city on a hill” sermon to Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence; from the Revolution to the Civil War; from a proposed nineteenth-century Christian Amendment to the Constitution to Martin Luther King, Jr.’s call for civil rights; from George Washington to Ronald Reagan.

Debates about religion and politics are often more divisive than illuminating. Secularists point to a “wall of separation between church and state,” while many conservatives act as though the Founding Fathers were apostles in knee britches. As Meacham shows in this brisk narrative, neither extreme has it right. At the heart of the American experiment lies the God of what Benjamin Franklin called “public religion,” a God who invests all human beings with inalienable rights while protecting private religion from government interference. It is a great American balancing act, and it has served us well.

Meacham has written and spoken extensively about religion and politics, and he brings historical authority and a sense of hope to the issue. American Gospel makes it compellingly clear that the nation’s best chance of summoning what Lincoln called “the better angels of our nature” lies in recovering the spirit and sense of the Founding. In looking back, we may find the light to lead us forward.

“In his American Gospel, Jon Meacham provides a refreshingly clear, balanced, and wise historical portrait of religion and American politics at exactly the moment when such fairness and understanding are much needed. Anyone who doubts the relevance of history to our own time has only to read this exceptional

book.”—David McCullough, author of 1776

“Jon Meacham has given us an insightful and eloquent account of the spiritual foundation of the early days of the American republic. It is especially instructive reading at a time when the nation is at once engaged in and deeply divided on the question of religion and its place in public life.”—Tom Brokaw, author of The Greatest Generation

“An absorbing narrative full of vivid characters and fresh thinking, American Gospel tells how the Founding Fathers—and their successors—struggled with their own religious and political convictions to work out the basic structure for freedom of religion. For me this book was nonstop reading.”—Elaine Pagels, professor of religion, Princeton University, author of Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas

“Jon Meacham is one of our country’s most brilliant thinkers about religion’s impact on American society. In this scintillating and provocative book, Meacham reveals the often-hidden influence of religious belief on the Founding Fathers and on later generations of American citizens and leaders up to our own. Today, as we argue more strenuously than ever about the proper place of religion in our politics and the rest of American life, Meacham’s important book should serve as the touchstone of the debate.”

—Michael Beschloss, author of The Conquerors

“At a time when faith and freedom seem increasingly polarized, American Gospel recovers our vital center—the middle ground where, historically, religion and public life strike a delicate balance. Well researched, well written, inspiring, and persuasive, this is a welcome addition to the literature.”—Jonathan D. Sarna, Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History, Brandeis University, author of American Judaism: A History

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Historian and Newsweek editor Meacham's third book examines over 200 years of American history in its quest to prove the idea of religious tolerance, along with the separation of church and state, is "perhaps the most brilliant American success." Meacham's principal focus is on the founding fathers, and his insights into the religious leanings of Jefferson, Franklin, Adams and Co. present a new way of considering the government they created. So it is that the religious right's attempts to reshape the Constitution and Declaration of Independence into advocating a state religion of Christianity are at odds with the spirit of religious freedom ("Our minds and hearts, as Jefferson wrote, are free to believe everything or nothing at all—and it is our duty to protect and perpetuate this sacred culture of freedom"). Meacham also argues for the presence of a public religion, as exemplified by the national motto, "In God We Trust," and other religious statements that can be found on currency, in governmental papers and in politicians' speeches. Subsequent chapters consider a wartime FDR and a Reagan who grew increasingly enamored of Armageddon. All are well-written, but none reach the immediacy and vigor of the chapters on the nation's birth. Two extensive appendices reprint early government documents and each president's inaugural bible verses. Meacham's remarkable grasp of the intricacies and achievements of a nascent nation is well worth the cover price, though his consideration of Reagan feels like that of an apologist.

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Review

Advance Praise for American Gospel

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About the Author

Jon Meacham received the Pulitzer Prize for his 2008 biography of Andrew Jackson, *American Lion*. He is also the author of the *New York Times* bestsellers *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power*, *American Gospel*, and *Franklin and Winston*. Meacham, who teaches at Vanderbilt University and at The University of the South, is a fellow of the Society of American Historians. He lives in Nashville and in Sewanee with his wife and children.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Bobbie Wallace:

This American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation are reliable for you who want to be considered a successful person, why. The key reason why of this American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation can be one of the great books you must have is definitely giving you more than just simple examining food but feed a person with information that probably will shock your prior knowledge. This book will be handy, you can bring it everywhere and whenever your conditions both in e-book and printed types. Beside that this American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation forcing you to have an enormous of experience for example rich vocabulary, giving you trial of critical thinking that we all know it useful in your day exercise. So , let's have it appreciate reading.

John Kuykendall:

The particular book American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation will bring you to definitely the new experience of reading a book. The author style to describe the idea is very unique. If you try to find new book to read, this book very ideal to you. The book American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation is much recommended to you to learn. You can also get the e-book through the official web site, so you can quicker to read the book.

Keith Lugo:

Reading a publication tends to be new life style in this era globalization. With examining you can get a lot of information that could give you benefit in your life. Along with book everyone in this world may share their idea. Books can also inspire a lot of people. A great deal of author can inspire their particular reader with their story or even their experience. Not only the storyline that share in the guides. But also they write about the information about something that you need illustration. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your sons or daughters, there are many kinds of book that exist now. The authors these days always try to improve their proficiency in writing, they also doing some research before they write for their book. One of

them is this American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation.

Marian Dyer:

This American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation is brand-new way for you who has attention to look for some information mainly because it relief your hunger of knowledge. Getting deeper you in it getting knowledge more you know or you who still having bit of digest in reading this American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation can be the light food to suit your needs because the information inside this particular book is easy to get by anyone. These books build itself in the form which is reachable by anyone, sure I mean in the e-book type. People who think that in book form make them feel drowsy even dizzy this e-book is the answer. So you cannot find any in reading a e-book especially this one. You can find what you are looking for. It should be here for a person. So , don't miss this! Just read this e-book kind for your better life along with knowledge.

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