Book Review

Revolution: The Birth of the Greatest Nation in the History of the World, by Eric Metaxas, 640 pages, hardcover, $35.91, ISBN-13: 978-1631440885, Odysseus Books, 2026.

When Dr Huntoon asked me to review this book, I set aside two others on related themes. Over three days, I glanced up from the book and noticed with bewilderment that it was past 1 A.M., even though it seemed as though it had been 8 P.M. just 15 minutes before.

Having been born in, and grown up in, Washington, D.C., where we played Revolutionary War in the afternoons of our 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade years, and read the words of our Founders chiseled in stone all over my native city, I was quite familiar with many of the people and events in this book. Metaxas, however, uniquely brings the characters involved and the events to life and into focus as no one else in my experience has ever done.

This book is not simply an account of actions and events, but of faith, of the "providential dispensation" from God to His people. The Revolution was indeed a singularity in world history. No other event can compare to the creation of a nation founded upon the principles upon which these United States of America are founded, search history as you will. That is the very reason why we are under attack, and likely the reason Metaxas wrote this book. He understands.

Metaxas examines the lives of those involved, and the causes of the events that led to the Revolution in detail, explicating the events with historical, family, and cultural background information missing from other accounts, and introducing those involved with detail not just about their acts but about their thoughts, their faith, families, and philosophy. Those in England sympathizing with the Americans, e.g., Edmund Burke, the Irishman in Parliament, and those with only contempt for Americans, are included.

Subchapters within chapters serve to knit the events and interactions together.

The idea that the Founders were "Deists" is debunked. Metaxas gives plenty of evidence that what the Americans did was explicitly religious. John Adams's son wrote "The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity." The Founding of America was part of God's plan for the whole world, and "first organized the social compact on the foundation of the Redeemer's mission upon earth."

The influence of George Whitefield and "The Great Awakening" is discussed, as is the effect of the Protestant Reformation. Everything on earth is run by flawed human beings. The main thing about the Protestant Reformation, which is not discussed in my experience, is that the major reform needed was getting kings out of religion. Europe became Christian mainly through various kings becoming Christian, and the power of kings corrupts. Kings who became Christian morphed directly into confusing divine power with worldly power. Because of kings and merging of Church and State, in some cases with corruption in religion (e.g., Pope Adrian IV), the Reformation became the Split. Ireland, which had government but no State, was the exception.

Metaxas points out many of the Founders' adherence to the example of Jesus Christ. George Washington's instructions to Benedict Arnold included an injunction to respect the Catholics in Canada. The Founders generally were animated by the command of Jesus Christ to love our neighbors as ourselves. When the British added their takeover of Philadelphia to their occupation of New York, Samuel Adams reassured us; "We have appealed to Heaven for the justice of our cause and in Heaven we have placed our trust…. Numerous have been the manifestations of God's providence in sustaining us…. In the gloomy period of adversity, we have had our cloud by day and pillar of fire by night" (p 461).

The British themselves were merciless, and in addition to their own barbarities, had hired vicious Hessian mercenaries and even considered hiring an army of Muslim Moors from the "fez of Morocco" and Russian mercenaries. British General Percy's words: "They will never again stand before us in the field. Everything seems to be over with them…. This campaign will put a total end to the war." However, a thick fog allowed Washington and his army to escape the British when Captain John Glover's Marblehead men took them across the East River from Long Island (pp 353-370). There are other examples of what appear to be providential occurrences, which were taken to be so by those affected.

Metaxas also humorously inserts references to more recent history, describing General Gates, who thought he was better than Washington: "At the end of the battle, Gates was observed quite bizarrely to flee the scene…as though it had been Chappaquiddick" (p 524). His short "Author's Note" (p 580) is hilarious.

Metaxas, as am I, is involved in the ongoing Revolution, and in opposing attempts to nullify it, whether from Communism or Islam. He points out that the Founders knew the Revolution was not over; that only virtue, morality and the Judeo-Christian religion would keep it alive. "Let it simply be asked where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths…?" (Washington, Farewell Address). Has any member of Congress or President ever been brought to account for breaking the oath of office? (Note, lying while taking an oath is approved in Islam.)

Metaxas states at the end: "The general drift toward a secular view among our own cultural elites… —an attitude that… mirrors the sneering attitude toward faith and virtue of the British elites of the Revolutionary era—has so encouraged the idea that this is possible, and that America can flourish apart from faith and virtue, that we have rarely dared to ask whether this is indeed true. It was never the goal of this book to delve into this question, but in the course of examining the events and wellsprings of the Revolution, it has become increasingly unavoidable."

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