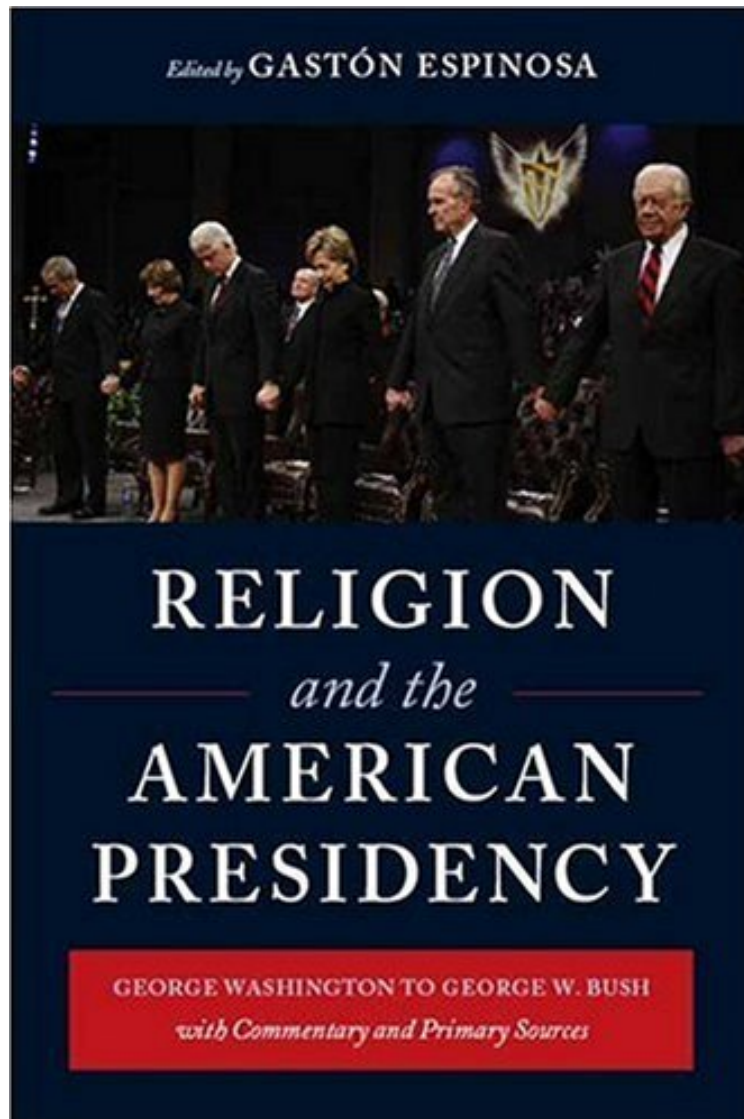


[Mobile pdf] Religion and the American Presidency: George Washington to George W. Bush with Commentary and Primary Sources (Columbia Series on Religion and Politics)

## Religion and the American Presidency: George Washington to George W. Bush with Commentary and Primary Sources (Columbia Series on Religion and Politics)

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George Washington to George W. Bush with Commentary and Primary Sources (Columbia Series on Religion and Politics):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Christian Nation?By P. GIBSONNote: This book hand picks and focuses upon only thirteen presidents. Reading this book was as difficult as walking the line that many of our politicians have had to walk, and still must walk today when it comes to religion. I say this partly because I expected something else, but make no mistake, when most people want to discuss religion and the presidency, their primary interest is probably the concept of the United States being a "Christian nation". And although essays such as those on Washington and Jefferson reluctantly admit that many of their religious utterances were political rather than deeply held or practiced, it seemed to me that some of the essayists went out of their way trying to frame a particular president in a religious light, rather than intending to enlighten the reader. I expected a more nuanced treatment that revealed the complexities of the issue but I suppose that most authors wanting to write upon such a subject almost presupposes the author's own fervent interest in their subject matter; and seldom are such people very temperate in their desire to spread of their word. Some of the early essays seemed intent upon pointing out every instance where a president or president to be uttered, "God, Providence, the Almighty etc, as a way of proving their point of just how religious these men actually were. But even in the essay about Reagan for example, the essayist went on for pages about the scourge of communism while hardly even mentioning the president. These tendencies in both writing as well as governing were sometimes disturbing. Luckily some other essayists were a more even handed. My favorite essays were those on Carter and Lincoln. The Lincoln essay by Andrew R. Murphy was excellent. It speaks about how Lincoln was never baptized, never joined a church, and who early on argued alternative views to common religion; still it spoke of how certain historians have painted Lincoln as our most religious president. Throughout the book as well as throughout our society, it is common to confuse a moral sense with a religious one. The essay on Carter demonstrated just how complex religion, presidents and issues can really be. But let's back up and assume for a moment that Washington, Jefferson and Madison were paragons of religious virtue. Both their religious virtue and "Christian" morality were tarnished by their vast slave holdings. And, yes, like most people of the day, they defended slave holdings by invoking religion just as the Ku Klux Klan later defended their beliefs and lynchings under the Christian banner. When we wish to debate the virtues of our Christian nation, we should always remember that we are looking back upon a society where slavery and then Jim Crow were valued; where women were property and not allowed to vote; where native Americans were pushed off their land in exchange for treaty after treaty that was broken time and time again. Although our founding fathers pushed beyond the limits of those who governed before them, looking back, they were not as moral as the truths they preached. No matter how good we are today, we suffer the same imperfections. So although we think we know better, we should never settle for our current values. Instead we should push beyond our comfort level toward values beyond our limits. Finally, in the essay of George W. Bush, the essayist hits upon what appears to me to be a clear a consensus within the book that, "For those who dislike any display of religious commitment from a public figure-and that includes many educated American of liberal political conviction and probably the vast majority of elites in Europe- . . ." Blah, blah, blah. There are so many things wrong with this attitude that I can hardly begin to name them, but I will say that if we had a president of any other "faith" than that from a typical Judeo-Christian mold, many good-hearted, tolerant, conservative Christians would find themselves vastly uncomfortable with this religious expression, but I'm not even sure that they then would understand what the minority in this country might feel like when liberal, educated Christians are dismissed in this manner. The essayist did mention that Bush included, for the first time in 229 years, a mention of the "Islamic faith" in his 2nd inaugural address, but the essayist failed to mention (as did Washington's essayist) that during George Washington's term of office the Muslims were also mentioned when the Treaty with Tripoli stated that, ". . . the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion".

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This book challenges the idea that the mixing of religion and presidential politics is a new phenomenon. It explores how presidents have drawn on their religious upbringing, rhetoric, ideas, and beliefs to promote their domestic and foreign policies to the nation. This influence is evident in Washington's decision to add "so help me God" to the presidential oath, accusations by Adam's supporters that Jefferson was an infidel, Lincoln's biblical metaphors during the Civil War, and FDR's call to fight against Nazi totalitarianism on behalf of Judeo-Christian civilization. It is also apparent in Truman's support for Israel, Eisenhower's Cold War decision to add "In God We Trust" on American currency, the debate over JFK's Catholicism, Jimmy Carter's born-again Christianity, Reagan's "Evil Empire" speech, Clinton's public repentance, and George W. Bush's "crusade" against Islamic terrorists. This volume explores these issues of religion and power in the presidencies of Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Lincoln, FDR, Truman, Eisenhower, JFK, Carter, Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Clinton, and George W. Bush through scholarly interpretations, primary sources, and illustrations.

This interesting book balances presidential professions of faith with acknowledgment of private sins and the objections of nonbelievers to explicit religious demonstrations in public life. (Rich Barlow Boston Globe) Among its strengths is the inclusion of a considerable amount of newsworthy material for the thirteen presidents whose religious views are examined. (Al Menendez Voice of Reason) Immediately, one can imagine the value of this book in attempts to teach undergraduates something about religion and politics in American history. (Kansas History) About the Author Gastn Espinosa is associate professor of religious studies at Claremont McKenna College. His books include *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States* and *Mexican American Religions: Spirituality, Activism, and Culture*. He is the editor of the Columbia University Press Series on Religion and Politics.