



Lee, Richard G., ed.

The American Patriot's Bible: The Word of God and the Shaping of America

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

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After spending a couple of weeks in this Bible I feel that I'm now in a position to offer an informed opinion on its contents. Much of the reaction to this Bible came from problems with the concept, or the description given by prominent theologians, but much of the hoopla wasn't based on any actual interaction with the Bible itself. Having said that, I think that *The American Patriot's Bible* is a strange product; I don't see the nationalism (which I don't see as synonymous with patriotism) that others saw, nor do I find it idolatrous, but I do wonder why the material in this Bible couldn't have been (or better yet, wasn't) published as a standalone volume. There's nothing wrong with highlighting the role that God has played in America's history, but to do it in the manner that the *APB* has done it doesn't seem quite right.

The application of Scripture to certain points of American history seems strained at best. For example, in 1Samuel 4 we read of the Philistines capturing the Ark of the Covenant and at the end of the chapter Phineas' wife gives birth to their son and names him Ichabod because "the glory had departed from Israel." (1Sam. 4:21) Based on this verse there is a note that talks about "A Nation's Flag" and quotes Henry Ward Beecher as saying:

A thoughtful mind, when it sees a nation's flag, sees not the flag only, but the nation itself; and whatever may be its symbols, its insignia, he reads chiefly in the flag the government, the principles, the truths, the history which belongs to the nation that sets it forth. (308)

It's a nice quotation, and probably true when one really thinks about it, but one wonders how 1Samuel 4:21 brings this quotation to mind. There's a fundamental difference between the Ark of the Covenant and a country's flag. The Ark of the Covenant, aside from being instituted by God himself, was a symbol of *God's* presence with Israel. One would think that such a quotation would be more appropriate in let's say, the Isaianic passages which speak about God's "standard" (i.e., banner/flag – Is. 49:22; 59:19; 62:10). While I agree with Beecher's basic definition of what flags represent, I can't see any of those things as comparable to God's presence or glory.

There also seems to be a watered down reconstruction of history which ignores some of the more unseemly bits. To take one example, the article on "Christianity in Colonial America" says:

Beginning early in the seventeenth century, settlers from Spain, France, Sweden, Holland, and England claimed land and formed colonies along the eastern coast of North America, and the struggle for control of this land continued for well over a hundred years. (I-5)

"Struggle for control of this land" is a euphemism for battles fought to steal this land from the indigenous natives. Now what's done is done, and every American living today enjoys the benefits of what was done back then, but the end doesn't always justify the means, and if we're going to tell the story then let's tell it in all of its gory details.

There are also a couple of things that I wouldn't think the producers of this Bible would have included in it. On p. I-42 there's a full page picture of Martin Luther King, Jr., who while being a great leader in the Civil Rights Movement, denied the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity (at least in seminary, and to my knowledge he never showed any evidence of repenting of these beliefs). It seems that a conservative Christian audience, i.e., the target audience of this Bible, might take exception to this. Two pages later on p. I-44 there's a picture of President Obama showing that King's "dream" has finally come to fruition, but again, given the target audience, I wonder how many of them would be pleased with President Obama's inclusion in this Bible given that they were those who opposed his presidency the loudest.

To be honest, the best features of this Bible are the aesthetics; it's really nice to look at. The best notes are those that make a little bit of sense, like when a certain Bible passage is what a president held his hand over while being sworn into office. The vast majority the notes just seem out of context and loosely connected to the actual text. Oh, and let me mention this as well, in highlighting the faith of our founders which was for the most part Christian, religious liberty is obscured. Sure, most of our founders wanted to practice their Christianity, but they wanted the freedom to practice their faith, and also for others to have the freedom to practice theirs. Now I'm not saying that this Bible would deny this, but it certainly doesn't highlight it. I would find it

hard to recommend this work to anyone, unless of course you're interested in a Bible with a lot of random quotes and articles on a somewhat romanticized view of American history.