Building on his seminal work in *The Great Awakening*, Thomas Kidd uses *God of Liberty* to show the vital contributions of American religious conviction to every area of discourse and action in the Revolutionary era. In this wide-ranging and comprehensive volume, Kidd examines the religious understandings of the residents of the British North American colonies, arguing that, despite the deep-seated and significant theological difference between churches of the era, there were certain fundamental beliefs, especially those relating to religious and political liberty, which enabled American Christians to present a powerful and united front in the creation of a new nation.

Kidd begins by arguing that the first Great Awakening provided the groundwork for the American Revolution by “prim[ing] colonists to employ apocalyptic ideas to understand the crisis with Britain” (35). Arguing that the radically democratic and egalitarian ethos of the Awakening encouraged the American colonists to seek equal representation in the political sphere, he suggests that, at the same time, it gave them the language and social structure to accomplish a general uprising. He also examines, albeit briefly, the theories of justifiable resistance and the rhetorical understanding of the colonies as a special creature of God.

Kidd seeks to acknowledge, and even extol, the role of Christians and of Christianity in the Revolution, but at the same time seems desirous of not inciting a call to a return to a particularly Christian heritage. For Kidd, the Christianity of the Revolution is more of a moralistic, libertarian, unitary call to arms than it is a theological system. He argues that the American Revolution was a Christian movement but only in a limited sense: it was perpetrated by a people informed by wide-ranging variations of Christian belief. He argues that the Christian unity of the period was limited to five distinct commonalities (common beliefs or widely-accepted as common bases of discourse): the disestablishment of state religion, the belief in a Creator God who worked in and through nations and who acted as a guarantor of liberty, the belief that a republic could only succeed when populated by virtuous citizens, and a pessimistic certainty of the inevitability of human sinfulness characterized most sects of the Christian faith.
of the time (6ff). There were certainly more controversial and divisive issues, but they were peripheral to the purpose of nation building.

He suggests that the best lessons of the era, however, are not that people believed in God (or at least pretended to for the sake of commercial or political success “simply employ[ing] the language of evangelicalism” (87)) but rather to learn from the example of Thomas Jefferson and John Leland, whose relationship provided an opening illustration for the book. Jefferson and Leland, differing greatly in religious conviction, nevertheless collaborated in the election of 1800, resulting in Jefferson’s election as president despite his somewhat unorthodox religious views and in Leland’s iconic presentation of a giant cheese in celebration. Arguing that the primary lesson is a warning to avoid claims of divine favor and approbation for specific causes, Kidd also suggests that modern politicians and conservative Christian leaders can also learn a lesson about the value of political and religious pragmatism (254). For Kidd, Christianity during the Revolution becomes a short hand for a common cause, commonality of interests, and secular and sacred ecumenism based on a traditionalist and unobtrusive moral code.

Kidd hasn’t created a definitive work on the role of religion in the American Revolution. Rather, he has provided a basic overview of the general situation of religion during the period. The book was well stocked with references to sermons and political pamphlets of the era that provided context. The epilogue, addressing De Tocqueville’s assessment of the United States in the 1830s, made the clearest discussion of the impact of religion in the revolutionary American state. Its primary fault is that it lacks a tight, cohesive argument. Nevertheless, it is a highly readable book that will be accessible to a wide audience and specialists in the American Revolution will look forward to reading Kidd’s most recent contribution to the field, *Patrick Henry: First Among Patriots* (2011).

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