

BOOK REVIEW

of

Benjamin Hart, *Faith & Freedom: The Christian Roots of American Liberty*,
Lewis and Stanley, 1988.

This book is in the Evangel Library,
and this review is presented by Larry D. Paarmann.

Once in awhile we come across a book that we have never heard of before, one that surprises us with its clarity and the way it illuminates a perhaps familiar topic for us, and since it was unexpected we are very pleased with a such a good find. Such is this book by Benjamin Hart to me. My sister's dentist gave this book to her, for what reason I am not sure, but since she didn't particularly want it she gave it to me. Perhaps some of you have heard of it, or perhaps you have read it since it has been in the Evangel Library for some time. I had not heard of it prior to my sister giving it to me. If indeed this book is not widely known, I think it should be.

The book doesn't tell us much about the author, but apparently he is with The Heritage Foundation. There are a number of endorsements on the back cover and inside the front cover. So apparently some know about the book! William F. Buckley, Jr., says "Hart's lucid and exciting book is a shot in the arm for all those curious to know the real story of the rise of freedom and democracy in America." John Whitehead says "Hart's book is a convincing historical and philosophical examination of the basis of all freedom, which is religion and morality." And Robert Bork says "Mr. Hart has written a much-needed corrective to current dogma. He demonstrates that our freedoms, and the morality that sustains them, grew out of religious faith".

It seems that many in our society feel uncomfortable with the history of the United States of America, particularly that history that has to do with the founding of this nation. Since the downplaying of the importance of religion in the history of the United States is so prevalent, I suspect that many of us have unconsciously assumed that at least some of the modern misinformation is so. No doubt this was (is?) at least true of me. Was Washington a deist? Not according to Hart, and he provides far more evidence for the genuineness of Washington's Christianity than could be provided for most of us. Hart complains of society's ignorance of history as follows: "It is extremely frustrating to write history today because so much effort must go toward correcting the countless distortions that have been inserted into accounts of our heritage by militant secularists who twist facts to suit their narrow anti-religious political agendas."

Since there are many books that attempt to correct what Christians perceive as an increasing amount of misinformation and distortion about American history in public schools and in politics, what is unique about Hart's book? Hart's book is much more than an effort at correcting certain facts about history. He attempts to put the religious roots of America's founding in the broad scope of the history of Western civilization, and with the corresponding philosophy and religion.

According to Hart, the story can be traced back to Emperor Constantine, when the Church and the State joined forces. Hart thinks that there is very little evidence that Constantine's conversion was genuine, and he speculates that it was primarily for political reasons. Some sort of cooperation and mutual support between Church and State then continued for centuries, even through and beyond the Reformation. According to Hart, when "the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock in 1620, their primary mission was to escape Constantine's legacy".

Hart also states that about "three-quarters of the North American colonists at the time of the American Revolution were of Puritan extraction. Puritanism was the dominant political and intellectual force throughout the 17th and the 18th centuries." And it is his contention that this Puritan influence was very strongly felt in the decision to declare independence from England, in the writing of the Declaration of Independence, and in the writing of the Constitution. These contentions are strongly disputed today, but Hart provides much evidence in support of them. For example, Hart says it "is very useful to lay out the Book of Deuteronomy, particularly chapter 8, alongside a copy of the Declaration of Independence. The parallels and the obvious connection between the two documents are startling. America was very concerned about the righteousness of its cause, not only in the eyes of the rest of the world, but also, and more importantly, in the eyes of God."

This book is a significant corrective to the misinformation and distortions that often pass for history in our society today. What's more, we should not willingly give up the rich heritage of the founding of this nation, which should lead us to praise God who in His sovereignty saw fit to lead the founders to establish a nation based on Biblical principles.