

Book Notes:

Reading in the Time of Coronavirus

Rev. Charles Brock: Washington's Character, Actions Bring Solace in Modern-Day America

By Pat Cuneo

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In his soon-to-be published book, *Holy Warrior Presidents: War, Religion, and the American Narrative*, Rev. Dr. Charles Brock examines America through its wars and the religion and foreign policies of more than a dozen presidents.

Rev. Brock's work is everything you would expect it to be: a tour de force reflecting his command of religion and history. Not surprisingly, the chapter on America's first president, General George Washington, reflects the skills and wisdom of both the author and his subject and seems especially appropriate to discuss as America yearns for leadership and guidance amid the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic.

As Rev. Brock describes it, Washington was not a philosophical theorist but a man of vast experience and enormous political savvy. "He was a uniting figure allowing the radical Americans to dream their dreams, and he tried to put them into reality. He understood America to be an experiment, and said in his first Inaugural Address that 'the preservation of the sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the Republican model of Government are ... staked on the *experiment* entrusted to the hands of the American people.' That experiment was based on Puritan covenant theology, the political philosophy of the English revolution, and many other backgrounds that scholars will discuss until the end of time. The experiment took root and flourished in America and is still indispensable for us today."

Washington's religion was Deist-providential-rationalist, Rev. Brock points out, like most of the other Founding Fathers. "Thoroughly a Cincinnatus warrior, farmer, and gentleman, he was inclined toward theological Unitarianism and made few references to Jesus. (But) by not concentrating on Jesus and assuming him divine, as many of the churches did and still do, Washington helped free

Americans from demanding creedal restrictions.”

Washington’s own life, Rev. Brock explains, “reflected the gentlemanly scope expected at that time, and duty and honor were common Roman and Deist virtues and meticulously followed. The District of Columbia, with its official buildings copying Roman architecture and the Mall with the American heroes, typifies what George Washington and the Founders set out to do.”

As such, Washington’s life also reflected an amazing reliance on providence. He saw the Revolutionary War as “little short of a standing miracle” considering how close the Continental Army was to ultimate defeat so many times. “There were so many examples of his fearless horsemanship on the battlefield with bullets whistling around him continuously, but escaping unharmed, that one does wonder about it all. There is a stunning example of military providence – or was it luck?” Rev. Brock asks.

If the Roman hero Cincinnatus fits Washington well, perhaps, too, does the biblical persona Joshua – the warrior and leader of nations.

To read an excerpt from Rev. Charles Brock's soon-to-be published book, click [HERE!](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rev. Charles Brock, an Erie native, is an Emeritus Fellow, Chaplain, and Director of Ministerial Education at Mansfield College, Oxford, UK, where he taught for 35 years. He serves as the Director of the Institute on the American Dream at Penn State Behrend. Rev. Brock is acting minister of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Girard, Pa., and he is a Founding Member of the Jefferson Educational Society. Rev. Brock serves as the Director of the Brock Institute for Mega Issues Education at the Jefferson and serves as Secretary of the Jefferson Educational Society’s Board of Trustees.

Pat Cuneo serves as the Coordinator of Publications at the Jefferson Educational Society. He is a former reporter, editor, and columnist for the Erie Times-News. An Erie native, he is a 1978 graduate of the University of Notre Dame and studied journalism at Poynter Institute and the American Press Institute. He recorded his first “45” for Franklin Records in Fort Wayne, Ind., in 1979 (“Lost and Lonely”), performed as a singer-songwriter for the Alex Findley Band at regional folk festivals for more than a decade and was a member of the Nashville Songwriters Association from 1992 to 2007.

