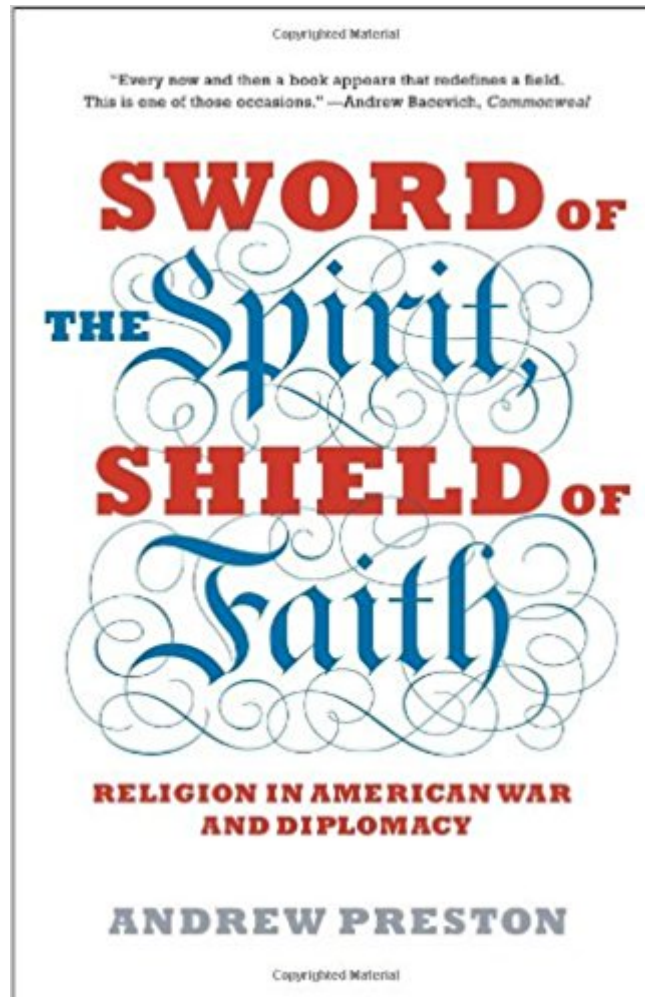


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Sword Of The Spirit, Shield Of Faith: Religion In American War And Diplomacy



Synopsis

Winner of the Charles Taylor Prize for Literary Non-Fiction
Finalist for the Cundhill Prize in History
A richly detailed, profoundly engrossing story of how religion has influenced American foreign relations, told through the stories of the men and women "from presidents to preachers" who have plotted the country's course in the world. Ever since John Winthrop argued that the Puritans' new home would be "a city upon a hill," Americans' role in the world has been shaped by their belief that God has something special in mind for them. But this is a story that historians have mostly ignored. Now, in the first authoritative work on the subject, Andrew Preston explores the major strains of religious fervor "liberal and conservative, pacifist and militant, internationalist and isolationist" that framed American thinking on international issues from the earliest colonial wars to the twenty-first century. He arrives at some startling conclusions, among them: Abraham Lincoln's use of religion in the Civil War became the model for subsequent wars of humanitarian intervention; nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries made up the first NGO to advance a global human rights agenda; religious liberty was the centerpiece of Franklin Roosevelt's strategy to bring the United States into World War II. From George Washington to George W. Bush, from the Puritans to the present, from the colonial wars to the Cold War, religion has been one of America's most powerful sources of ideas about the wider world. When, just days after 9/11, George W. Bush described America as "a prayerful nation, a nation that prays to an almighty God for protection and for peace," or when Barack Obama spoke of balancing the "just war and the imperatives of a just peace" in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, they were echoing four hundred years of religious rhetoric. Preston traces this echo back to its source. *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith* is an unprecedented achievement: no one has yet attempted such a bold synthesis of American history. It is also a remarkable work of balance and fair-mindedness about one of the most fraught subjects in America.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I bought the Kindle version of this Book and found the Kindle format to be great for this kind of academic writing. The book itself would make great reading in any format. As I read the book, I found myself largely agreeing with what the author has to say on his subject matter except for the three points below:

1. American Exceptionalism The beliefs that Preston alleges as support for American Exceptionalism are by no means unique to America. These beliefs may in fact be the basis on which some Americans consider themselves to be exceptional, but Preston should at least have mentioned that Americans are not in fact exceptional in virtue of believing that they are God's chosen people. More than one war has been fought between nations who have declared themselves exceptional on such grounds.
2. The Role of Religious Conviction in American Foreign Policy Decision Making In his discussion of how religious beliefs affect American foreign policy decisions, I think Preston needed to make a distinction between the religious beliefs which motivated American leaders to make their foreign policy decisions in a certain way and the religious beliefs which they may have used to sell those decisions to their fellow Americans. It is not enough to say, as Preston does, that these leaders are part of the same culture as the people to whom they must justify their decisions. To judge from the popular sermons of the day, some Founding Fathers appear to have been better educated and more in tune with "the Age of the Enlightenment" than many of their fellow Americans and in consequence were often much more sceptical of the claims of traditional religion than many of their fellow Americans.

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