



It's Sunday in America

Barry R. Harker

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Barry Harker's *It's Sunday in America* is a well-researched plea for America to grapple with its turbulent relationship with Christianity, particularly the battle over mandatory Sunday worship. In order to fend off a "religio-political cataclysm," Harker argues that it is in America's best interest to return to religious liberty and to keep God in public life.

The centerpiece of this seemingly contradictory plea is the thorny issue of religious freedom. The book's most concerted question is how Protestant Christianity can correct a monster of its own making—namely, Christian acquiescence to state secularism. In unadorned, clear language, it breaks down America's history in terms of a spiritual contest between two different concepts of spiritual freedom: one derived from God's law and one derived from the Constitution.

The book relies heavily on biblical texts and American history to do this, showing that Christianity was central to the lives of the people of Jamestown and New England. It argues that the Constitution and subsequent attempts to further the distance between church and state represent a different strand of American life and are not the sum total what it means to be American.

However, as much as the book celebrates the devout Protestant Christians of early America, it argues that their legal implementation of mandatory Sunday worship undermined their call to mass religiosity. In speaking about the Massachusetts Bay Puritans, Harker notes: "Puritanism undermined its own reforming instincts and weakened its influence" by passing religious laws in the spirit of "theocracy." In today's America, putting Christianity back into the legal system may produce the same result.

Some of the book's arguments are more contentious than others, such as that the Catholic Church wishes to take over the US by uniting the political and the spiritual. Harker also takes on the Catholic concept of "natural law," writing that "the ... Church's doctrines do not change," meaning that the Vatican is more comfortable with coercion than with trying to apply philosophy to the spreading of the gospel. The book ominously argues that God's law is supreme to secular law and that when the time comes, American Christians will have to choose the Bible over the Constitution.

The book sometimes runs on circular logic and trips on its predictions of "religio-political cataclysm." Questions about the actual efficacy of a more open public square may arise, and the book's doomsday rhetoric about an upcoming collapse creates feelings of unease.

It's Sunday in America is a well-researched paean that forwards an interesting notion of Protestant America. Harker's book may be most effective when it preaches to the choir, but it should not be overlooked by those of a more secular bent.

BENJAMIN WELTON (March 26, 2018)

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