

## Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

### The pitfalls of the 'conservative' ideology

The Heritage Foundation's Ben Hart, author of a new book, *Faith and Freedom: The Christian Roots of American Liberty* (Dallas: Lewis and Stanley, 1988), revealed the basic flaws of what passes for American "conservative" ideology, during a forum on his book here Oct. 26.

The book was presented as an effort to correct the thesis of some "evangelical" zealots, published in a number of books in recent years, that the American Revolution and U.S. Constitution had nothing to do with "real Christianity," but were the work of "secular humanists."

According to the "evangelical view," true religion and the state, even a constitutional republic, are incompatible, a view which justifies a mixture of fatalism about "this world," and an anti-government bias.

Compared to this "evangelical" view, Hart's book attempts to document the link between faith and the founding of the American republic.

However, the book raises many more questions than the author, either in his book or in person, is prepared to answer. In some telling cases, he is downright wrong.

The most obvious question is, "What *kind* of faith was coherent with the principles upon which the U.S. Constitution was based?" This could not be just any faith. But to answer this question in a serious and scholarly way, Hart would have had to undercut his own ideological bias, so he effectively ducked the question, claiming to treat his subject not as a theologian, but as a journalist.

So, he addressed the question only in terms of the Puritan rejection of ecclesiastical authority. This practice, he argued, led the Founding Fathers to reject the authority of the British Crown when that became overbearing, and to draft a Constitution whose intent was to limit the influence of the state over individual liberties.

For this reason, Hart said, the Founding Fathers were not liberal "secular humanists," but were rather "conservative" Christians.

Liberals, he argued, believe that man is "basically good" and can be perfected through education, and therefore, put faith in the state to achieve that end. Conservatives, on the other hand, believe in the "fallen state" of man as a sinner, and therefore prefer protections against any man or group of men gaining power over others through government.

"Conservatives," he said, "have a pessimistic view of human nature, and therefore view the state as evil."

In discussing the Constitution, he focused almost entirely on the First Amendment, which has served as the basis for the doctrine of the separation of church and state. He claimed that the issue of the separation of church and state had its roots in Roger Williams's expulsion by the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and was asserted to protect religion from the state, and not vice versa.

### A rigorous perspective

Still, Hart wound up as a strange bed-fellow of the very American Civil Liberties Union that he hates so much, because of his inability to define, rigorously, the substance of the faith that informed the principles in our Constitution.

For this he would do better to turn to the truly original work contained in

Graham Lowry's *How the Nation Was Won* (Washington, D.C.: EIR, 1988).

In this work, for the first time, the seminal influence of Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716), the great scientist, inventor, political counselor and theologian, on the Founding Fathers is documented. Here, it is established that Leibniz corresponded with John Winthrop, Jr. of Massachusetts and Gov. Alexander Spotswood of Virginia, and that his ideas animated the circles that Benjamin Franklin was introduced to in his youth.

Therefore, as an example, if one studied Leibniz's *Theodicy*, on the coherence between faith and reason and the origin of evil, he would have a good epistemological grounding in the kind of faith that informed the framers of the U.S. Constitution.

Such study, for one thing, demolishes the long-held fallacy that John Locke and the British empiricists were the intellectual antecedents of the Founding Fathers, because Leibniz violently clashed with Locke's bestial view of human cognition with a point-by-point rebuttal of Locke's *On Human Understanding*.

Leibniz was an intellectual enemy of the leaders of the so-called Enlightenment, those who could truly be called "secular humanists," like Voltaire, Rousseau, and Locke, who defended the oligarchy's degraded view of man.

But on the other hand, Leibniz did not hold to the doctrine of the "depravity" of man. While addressing the reality of evil, Leibniz maintained that through the nurture of those qualities in man that are "created in God's image," namely, his power to reason, man could play a role in increasing the good.

For Leibniz, government is not inherently evil; only government by slaves of evil is.