



The Founders' Key: The Divine and Natural Connection Between the Declaration and the Constitution and What We Risk by Losing It

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Today the integrity and unity of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are under attack by the Progressive political movement. And yet, writes Larry P. Arnn:

The words of the Declaration of Independence ring across the ages. The arrangements of the Constitution have a way of organizing our actions so as to produce certain desirable results, and they have done this more reliably than any governing instrument in the history of man. Connect these arrangements to the beauty of the Declaration and one has something inspiring and commanding.

From Chapter 2, The Founders Key

Dr. Arnn, president of Hillsdale College, reveals this integral unity of the Declaration and the Constitution. Together, they form the pillars upon which the liberties and rights of the American people stand. United, they have guided history's first self-governing nation, forming our government under certain universal and eternal principles. Unfortunately, the effort to redefine government to reflect the changing and growing social order has gone very far toward success. Politicians such as Franklin Roosevelt found ways to condemn and discard the Constitution and to redefine the Declaration to justify government without limit. As a result, both documents have been weakened, their influence diminished, and their meaning obscured paving the way for the modern administrative state, unaccountable to the will of the people.

The Founders Key is a powerful call to rediscover the connection between these two mighty documents, and thereby restore our political faith and revive our free institutions."

The Founders' Key: The Divine and Natural Connection Between the Declaration and the Constitution and What We Risk by Losing It Details

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From Reader Review The Founders' Key: The Divine and Natural Connection Between the Declaration and the Constitution and What We Risk by Losing It for online ebook

Bobby says

Dr. Larry P. Arnn has an argument to make in his new book *The Founder's Key*. This argument opposes the consensus scholarly opinion of the American founding which states that the Declaration and Constitution are incompatible. While notable scholars such as Gordon Wood, Joseph Ellis, and Cass Sunstein hold this opinion the book is not scholarly and is written to convince non-scholars that a "natural and divine" connection exists between the Constitution and Declaration.

Arnn points out that the Declaration and the constitution were written for the benefit of the common man to read and understand. *The Founder's Key* is true to this tradition. Even when Arnn writes about platonic forms or the state declarations and constitutions of Virginia and Pennsylvania, he simplifies these ideas to make them easier. The occasional pig analogy helps.

What Arnn does in *The Founders Key* is distill the arguments of other academics who write larger and more scholarly tomes on this subject. Glancing through the notes and suggested reading sections show how deeply influenced this work was mainly by Harry Jaffa, but also a number of the professors who work at his school. Arnn combines powerful defenses of the American founding and commanding critiques of American progressivism into one small, elegant, and easy book.

Of course, the thrust of Arnn's argument has merit. Madison and Jefferson, the principal authors of the document, were friends. They knew each other's work as if it were their own, and it was constantly on their mind. It's astonishing that any modern scholar can ignore this simple fact of the era. Though the relationship between the two documents may not be as close as Arnn implies.

How many times in 85 Federalist Papers would you guess the Declaration is mentioned? Just once. You'd think Publius would have used this connection more if he knew about it. And Madison even misquotes the Declaration in Federalist 40 when it's mentioned. Some reverence for the document. Arnn uses this passage from Federalist 40 to help his case by saying, "This is a quotation from the Declaration of Independence itself; it claims the direct authority of the Declaration to justify the work of the Constitutional Convention" (84). Arnn fails to say that it's misquoted or the only indication of the Declaration. Later in the chapter Arnn points out that in an obscure John Adams essay, Adams misquotes a couplet of Alexander Pope's poetry. If there is anything controversial about this book, it is the suggestion that there is a "divine" connection between the Declaration and Constitution. The Declaration does indeed have four references to God, but the constitution has none. Arnn implies, but does not explicitly say that because the references to God in the Declaration imply separation of powers and the three branches of government, that somehow the political science behind the constitution is divine. This should have been explored more by the author.

Some of the best sections of *The Founder's Key* are when he diverts his attention away from politics. Within the text, there is an enthralling comparison between the crafting of the constitution to the statues of Michaelangelo. Other sections on Thomas More and the Duke of Marlborough prove remarkably relevant to his thesis. More use of the liberal arts in this way would be welcome.

The argument that Arnn makes merits the price, though the rest of the book is sloppy. There are 80 pages of appendices which reprint four Federalist Papers, the Declaration, the Constitution, and a Madison essay on Property. They only serve to fatten the already short book at 120 pages. Those appendices have no reference to the page numbers in the text where he discusses the passages. Nor is there even an index.

Arnn's book delights throughout despite its minor flaws. Conservatives, libertarians, and progressives will all profit from deepening their understanding of the founding. Though, one book cannot be the key to unlocking the mystery of the founders..

Steven Northover says

I enjoy reading Arnn's work. He is clear, deliberate and methodical.

Colette says

This is a thought-provoking book that has a lot of good reading suggestions and notes. I enjoyed reading about the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and how they work together. I wish we had the nerve as a people to follow the plan they laid out. The discussion of how that framework has been changed in the last 100 years is interesting. I think this is a great introduction to our founding documents, as well as progressivism.

Eddie says

A great review of the relationship of the Declaration of Independence to the Constitution and the timelessness of what the founders put together. A great argument for originalists.

Jeff Randleman says

I quite typically enjoy reading books that are historical in nature, especially concerning our nation. I love reading about our founding, the strength of will that it took to accomplish, and I believe that we have drifted away from many of those principles in more recent history.

So I was excited to receive a copy of Larry P. Arnn's *The Founders' Key*. However, I was quite disappointed.

Subtitled *The Divine And Natural Connection Between The Declaration And The Constitution And What We Risk By Losing It*, I was sure this would be an enlightening read. I was wrong.

I agree with much of the premises outlined by Arnn in *The Founders' Key*. I just could not read it for any extended period of time without getting extremely bored.

What Arnn had to say was valid, and his point is quite accurate. But his style is dry and hard to take. Much of what he says has been written in other places, and his bibliography is full of other excellent resources containing similar discussions. But Arnn has alienated much of his audience with his dry prose. While I agree with most of what he says, I could barely make it though the way he said it.

The most redeeming aspect of the book comes in Part II: *Foundational Readings*. Here, Arnn has collected several fundamental American documents, gathering them into one convenient place for reference. These documents include:

* The Declaration Of Independence

- * The Constitution of the United States of America
- * Federalist No. 10: The Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection (Continued)
- * Federalist No. 39: The Conformity of the Plan to Republican Principles
- * Federalist No. 48: These Departments Should Not be So Far Separated as to Have No Constitutional Control Over Each Other
- * Federalist No. 49: Method of Guarding Against the Encroachments of Any One Department of Government by Appealing to the People Through a Convention
- * Federalist No. 51: The Structure of the Government Must Furnish the Proper Checks and Balances Between the Different Departments
- * "Property" by James Madison

While fundamentally I agree with most of Arnn's work here, and I love the collection of early American documents gathered, I was disappointed with *The Founders' Key*. My recommendation is to save your money. If you need a collection of early American documents, try *The Portable Patriot* or *The American Patriot's Almanac*. Like me, I'm sure you'll like these much better.

Do you enjoy early American history? If not, what period is your favorite? You can leave your thoughts in the comments section below.

Amber says

I think there is a lot better books out there on this subject.

Kendrick Hardin says

Short, simple, and to the point. This argument is not infallible, it is not meant to have a solution to the entire problem, but--moreover, I think-- a rebuttal and statement about and maybe for progressives.

Dale says

Published in 2012 by Thomas Nelson

Larry P. Arnn is the president of Hillsdale College and I suppose I should tell you that I receive Hillsdale's free monthly bulletin, *Imprimis*, which features excerpts of speeches given by guests at Hillsdale College. President Arnn is featured annually so I was fairly familiar with his work before I picked up this book. In fact, that was the reason I picked it up in the first place.

Arnn's key point in this book is that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are highly inter-related and that the efforts of some politicians and academics to separate them are not only incorrect but are also symptomatic of a larger effort to redefine and dilute the rights and governments described in both documents.

Arnn makes this point early and brilliantly in simple and soaring language. He demonstrates that the series of complaints against King George III in the Declaration describe how the King did not act as a faithful representative of his people, invaded their private rights and violated the principle of separation of powers (pages 36-37). These ideas are, of course, enshrined in the Constitution and he explains them quite well.

But, like the old joke about Chicago voters voting early and often, Arnn makes his point early and often...

Read more at: <http://dwdsreviews.blogspot.com/2012/...>

Cyndi Beane-Henry says

While at times I found this book a little difficult to follow, and it required me to read it in solitude, without distraction in order to follow and understand, I fully admit that I am NOT a student of politics, nor of our judicial system. However, this is a read that I believe every American of voting age should read! And I believe it should be a mandatory read for High School and collegiate students, as well.

With our political arena as corrupt as it is today, and the very future of our personal rights at stake within this country, Arnn points out just what our founding father's wished for the future of this great nation, as well as our firm foundation of belief in God.

Speaking of the Declaration and Constitution, Arnn writes: "The Founders understood the documents to be connected, to supply together the principles and the details of government, to be persuasive and durable unity." He further writes, "The words of the Declaration have a way of continuing to ring across the ages."

One of his closing statements reads: "Because of the principles that our country serves, and the institutions by which it serves them, have a beauty hardly matched in all history, they sound a call that all can answer. In their attraction and in our response is the hope for a free people. That is the Founders' key."

A few years ago, I purchased copies of the Declaration and the Constitution to read. I had come to the point to believe that our Country was lost and without hope. Arnn uses those very documents to show us the path that was layed out for us in 1776, and even before that with Almighty God, for a Nation that would be self-governing, and with an endless supply of hope, and future never ending.

I give this work Five Stars and my Thumbs Up!

****DISCLOSURE: This book was provided by Book Sneeze in exchange for an independent and non-biased review.

David McClendon, Sr says

Let me start by saying I really enjoyed reading this book. It is not the type of book I normally read but I figured I would give it a go. The author, Larry P Arnn, takes a look at how our present government is seeking to divorce the Constitution from the Declaration of Independence. By this it seems that certain politicians seem to think that one document should be adhered to and the other should be ignored.

For some strange reason many of those in office seem to think that the two documents contradict one another. I had never given it a second thought. It appears that our founding fathers were already struggling with how to handle slavery at the time the founding documents were written. They simply did not know how to handle the situation and hoped that a compromise could be reached somewhere down the road. The phrase "All men are created equal" caused a great deal of concern amongst these founding fathers.

The book is very well written and is an interesting read. It is not so scholarly as to make it unreadable by someone who isn't well versed in the history of these documents whereas, at the same time, it takes an in depth look at this issue.

Before you vote in this upcoming election, I think it would be well worth your time to take a look at this book. It may open your eyes.

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Drtaxsacto says

What is the relationship between the Declaration and the Constitution? Hillsdale President Larry Arnn writes that they are linked and should be. But he sees a problem. Starting with the Progressives (especially Woodrow Wilson, John Dewey, and even Frank Goodnow) they want to separate the logic between the two documents. That helped to create the "administrative state" - which becomes the fourth branch of government that is at once unaccountable and violative of the key concepts presented in the two founding documents that Arnn begins with.

Arnn makes a persuasive case that the intent here by the Progressives and their successors is that if you drop the link then the Constitution is not based on principles but on the notion of the moment. That is a dangerous idea.

The book is short and well done. What is equally interesting is the Appendix where Arnn puts a series of fundamental documents - The Declaration, the Constitution, Federalist papers 10, 39,48,49,51 and Madison's 1792 paper on Property. (He makes the picks on the appropriate Federalist papers (all of them Madison) - I might have chosen a couple of different ones (14 and 37) but those show the key role that Madison had in thinking about the founding).

Marc says

The author is delusional. To be fair, he is in large (but not good) company but as a university scholar, he should know better. His thesis, is that the Declaration of Independence and American Constitution are 1) divinely delivered, and 2) sacred, texts (and naturally self-evident besides). He opines that because of these conditions (all arguable) the text should be considered essentially immutable.

There is no such thing as a sacred text (sorry biblical adherents). First: there is no such thing as an unambiguous interpretation of any written text (whatever language); Second: translations of the sacred text (admittedly not an issue in this book) will always increase ambiguity (multiple translations-YOWSA!).

The people who tend to want everyone else to put their trust into a favoured sacred text (Koran, King James, DoI/Constitution, whatever) and favoured interpretation, are typically dangerous. Generally, these texts tend to be championed by authors who place themselves as priests or seers who want the rest of us to accept their interpretations of what the "founders/prophets" meant. In most cases they have something to gain from this (controlling faithful/parishioners, increasing congregations, selling books).

The American Constitution is a unique and important guiding document but it should never be seen as complete in today's context. I am certain that the founding authors understood this and expected the succeeding generations to be mature enough to understand and deal with it also.

It's long been time for the faithful/parishioners/citizens to stop being so lazy. Stop leaving the hard intellectual work of understanding completely for yourself, these revered texts. Use the wisdom of a Constitutional document to build new wise applications to a world that could not have been imagined by these forefathers OR be immature and hope that our answers must be fit narrowly into the frame built hundreds of years ago.

Dr. Arnn's bias is exposed on p.8 where he suggests that supporters of Obamacare (Nancy Pelosi specifically) contravene the Founders intentions for the term "right" by desiring "a law requiring all with money to purchase medical insurance so that those with none may have it for free." No application of the Affordable Health Care Act does this. This book is so full of flawed logic, hyperbolic rhetoric and favoured doomsday scenarios that it becomes silly.

The most useful thing about the book is that it does contain the text of the original documents and the Federalist Papers. But here too, the author's flawed thinking is revealed. He refers extensively to the Federalist Papers for support for a conservative interpretation of the two original documents, which expands the list of sacred documents to be considered and continues the fallacy that a written text (and its author) is infallible.

one man's divinity is another's heresy

Nikole Hahn says

“Observing America, Tocqueville remarks that he sees more government in America than he saw in France, which was the first centralized nation state.” – The Founders’ Key

The Founders’ Key a mix of philosophy and law. The book reads like a school text book, only bulging at the binder with so much information that a reader must read this slowly to have maximum absorption. Anyone who questions why we have the Constitution must first read both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as well as the Federalist papers in order to understand our country’s beginnings and why and how our Founders came up with this system of government. Sadly, we are far from the Founder’s country.

“These doctrines have, over the course of a century, transformed American political practice. The government now approaches half the size of the economy as a whole, and it may go where and do what it pleases. Our retirements, our health, and the relations inside our families are now the business of the federal government. Each business, large and small, is also under its purview. It is so pervasive that it seems to be the only way for society to work.”

Larry Arnn exposes us to the philosophy of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and it’s connection to each other. It was a fascinating read, but not for the light reader. It’s for someone who wishes to fully understand why the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence are important.

If you’ll remember, it was the Tea Party members elected to the House who made it a priority to read the Constitution aloud on the first session of the House. How many and who protested should be what’s important. The last time I read the Declaration of Independence was in grade school and I had to memorize a portion of it for a grade. Nowadays I doubt that happens. I doubt most people know what’s in the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution (besides the first two amendments). Arnn said it is poetry and divine.

Ironically, I finished this book on the night of our primary election. The Founders’ Key should be on every school’s required reading list for not only does it thoroughly explore both historic papers, but it also ends with the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and a few of the Federalist Papers and articles. Arnn does a great job at making his case, and I give the book five stars.

*Book given by publisher to review.

Alexis says

I was given this book for Christmas. Honestly, I didn't feel that the author made a very good case that our current system of government in the US has the Constitution on shaky ground. Having been raised in a religious culture, I do know that a lot of people believe there will be a time when the Constitution "hangs by a thread," but the author didn't really prove that this is the case, or what that would look like.

I did like his sections about the founders and their lives. I still maintain my prior opinions about the founders, that they were people (smart people! good writing skills people!) who did their best and a lot of good, but I also am not convinced there was anything particularly "divine" about what they did. The author tried to make the case that we should respect what the founders wanted, but he didn't say how things are different now or the same or how they could be. I just felt like he fell back on a lot of strong rhetoric about how great the revolution was and how great the founders were without making the case relevant for today.

(And after reading "The Righteous Mind" I can't help but notice that I'm low on caring for the "sacred" moral

value, but Arnn is really super high on it.)

p.s. Cory doctrow's book made me question the direction our government is going more convincingly and excitingly.

Donna says

The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are two of the most vital documents in our society. Today, many in the progressive movement would love to strip them from our conscience and change the way society works. When FDR separated the documents, he began the belief that both of them are powerful and necessary. In this new book, Dr. Larry Arnn shows just how important it is for us to fight to keep them together and useful today. Our Founders knew that the new government was fragile, but they also knew that a solid foundation was vitally important. Who is really supposed to control society and its people? What is the true purpose of government? What did the Founders know that has been lost to many citizens today? Why not pick up this book and re-learn the importance and reason for these two precious documents? It's time to discover, "The Founder's Key."

As a history buff, I was thrilled to receive a free copy of this book from the Book Sneeze program for review. As I listen to the news today, I find it vitally important that our children learn the real importance of our founding documents, and that the rest of us get a big reminder. This is a wonderful book to share and will make a great gift for anyone who wants to know more about what our country was founded on and what we stand to lose.
