

American Minute with Bill Federer Cervantes & Shakespeare: Two Writers who significantly shaped Western Literature

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Many countries had **individuals** whose **literary contributions** were so significant that they **shaped their language**.



Homer's *Iliad and Odyssey*, composed in the late 8th century BC, significantly influenced the development of the **Greek language**.

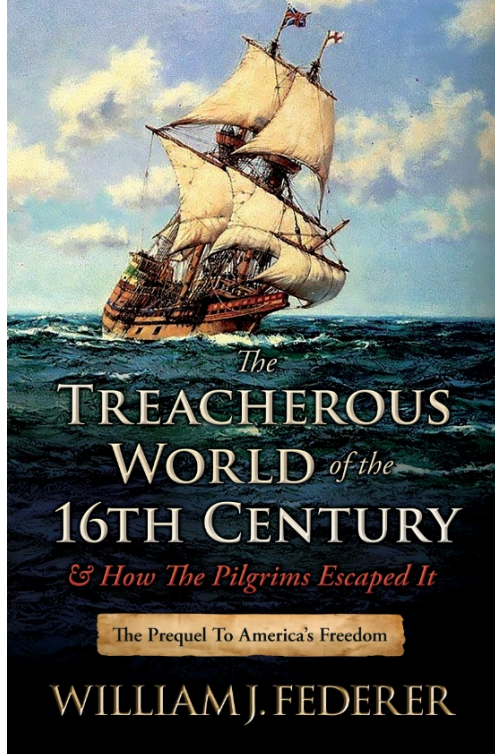
The **Latin language** was affected by **Roman writers** of the 1st century BC, like **Cicero, Vergil, Ovid** and **Horace**.

The **French language** was profoundly impacted by ***The Song of Roland***, written 1100 AD, which commemorated the defeat of a detachment of **Charlemagne's army** by Saracens at Roncevaux; and by **Molière** (1622-1673), one of France's greatest playwrights.

Martin Luther's translation of the *Bible*, published 1522-1545, greatly influenced the **German language** ...
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Similarly, **William Shakespeare** influenced the development of the **English language**, as **Miguel de Cervantes** did the **Spanish language**.

Miguel de Cervantes was born in 1547.

He fought the **Sultan's Ottoman Navy** at the **Battle of Lepanto** in 1571, where he was wounded and lost the use of his left hand.

Four years after the battle, while sailing across the Mediterranean, **Cervantes** was captured by **Muslim Barbary pirates**.

He spent five years in captivity as a **slave in Algiers** before being ransomed by the **Catholic Trinitarian Order** and returned to **Madrid, Spain**.

In 1605, **Cervantes** influenced **Western literature** with his work, ***Don Quixote de La Mancha***, considered **the first modern European novel**.

In a semi-autobiographical chapter, **Cervantes** described being held captive:

"They put a chain on me ... I passed my life in that bano

with several other gentlemen and persons of quality marked out as **held to ransom**;

but though at times, or rather almost always, **we suffered from hunger and scanty clothing**, nothing distressed us so much as hearing and seeing at every turn the unexampled and **unheard-of cruelties my master inflicted upon the Christians**.

... Every day he **hanged a man, impaled one, cut off the ears of another**; and all with so little provocation, or so entirely without any, that the Turks acknowledged **he did it merely for the sake of doing it**, and because he was by nature **murderously disposed towards the whole human race**."

In *Don Quixote de La Mancha* (First Part, ch. 39-40, 1605), **Cervantes** described how Muslim pirates raided Christian areas of the Mediterranean.

If they perchance were captured during their attacks, they would proclaim that they intended to become Christian, but upon release, they reverted back to raiding:

"Some obtain these testimonials with good intentions, others put them to a **cunning use**;

for when they go to pillage on **Christian territory**, if they chance to be cast away, or **taken prisoners**, they produce their certificates and say that from these papers may be seen **the object they came for, which was to remain on Christian ground**, and that it was to this end they joined the Turks in their foray ...

... In this way **they escape the consequences** of the first outburst and make their peace with the Church before it does them any harm,

and then when they have the chance they return to Barbary to become what they were before."

In 1853, prior to the American Civil War, anti-slavery **Senator Charles Sumner** wrote the book ***White Slavery in the Barbary States***.

Sumner documented that throughout the **Middle Ages**, **Barbary pirates** raided coastal towns from the eastern **Mediterranean** to the **Netherlands**, and as far north as **Iceland**, carrying away **white Europeans** as **slaves**.

They then sold them throughout the **Ottoman Empire** and the **North African Barbary states** of **Morocco**, **Algiers**, **Salée**, **Oran**, **Tunis**, **Tripoli** and **Bacra**.

This did not stop until they were defeated in the **Barbary Pirate Wars**, **1801-1805**, and **1816**.

Charles Sumner wrote:

"The **Saracens**, with the **Koran** and the **sword**, potent ministers of conversion, next broke from **Arabia**, as the messengers of a new religion, and pouring along these shores, diffused the faith and **doctrines of Mohammed** ... even ... entered **Spain**, and ... at Roncesvalles ... **overthrew the embattled chivalry of the Christian world** led by **Charlemagne**. (*The Song of Roland*) ...

Algiers, for a long time the **most obnoxious place** in the **Barbary States of Africa**, the chief seat of **Christian slavery** ... the **wall of the barbarian world** ..."

Sumner continued:

"And **Cervantes**, in the story of **Don Quixote** ... give(s) the narrative of a **Spanish captive** who had **escaped from Algiers** ...

The **author** is supposed to have **drawn from his own experience**; for during **five and a half years** he **endured the horrors of Algerine slavery**, from which

he was finally liberated by a **ransom** of about six hundred dollars."

Miguel de Cervantes stated:

- "We ought to love our **Maker** for His own sake, without either hope of good or fear of pain."
- "When **God** sends the dawn, he sends it for all."
- "Among the attributes of **God**, although they are all equal, **mercy** shines with even more brilliancy than **justice.**"
- "I do not believe that the **Good Lord** plays dice."
- "**Truth** ... will always bear up against **falsehood**, as **oil** does above **water.**"
- "Every one is as **God** made him, and often a great deal worse."
- "Never stand begging for that which you have the power to earn."
- "A proverb is a short sentence based on long experience."
- "**God** bears with the wicked, but not forever."
- "**God** who sends the wound sends the medicine."

In 1965, ***Man of La Mancha*** was made into an award-winning Broadway Musical, and in 1972, a motion picture starring Peter O'Toole and Sophia Loren.

The most popular song of the performance was "**The Impossible Dream**":

To dream the impossible dream

To fight the unbeatable foe
To bear with unbearable sorrow
To run where the brave dare not go

To right the unrightable wrong
To love pure and chaste from afar
To try when your arms are too weary
To reach the unreachable star

This is my quest to follow that star
No matter how hopeless, no matter how far
To fight for the right without question or pause
To be willing to march into Hell for a heavenly cause

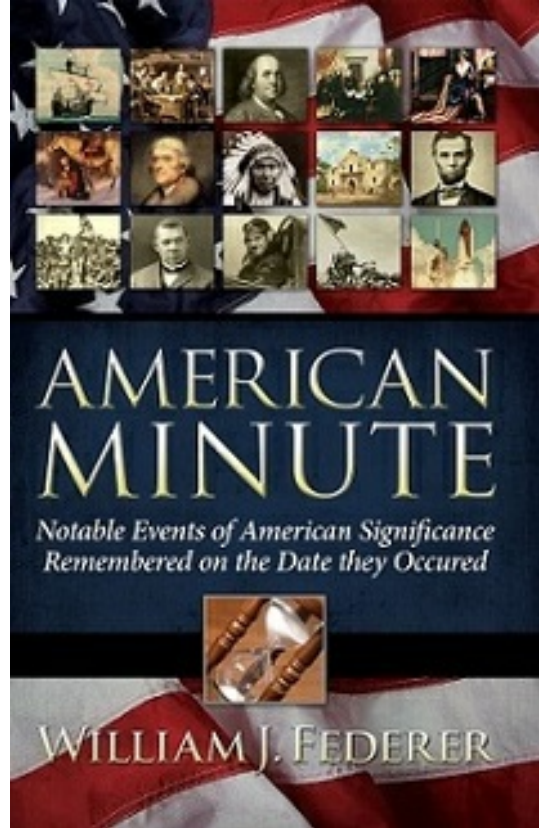
And I know if I'll only be true to this glorious quest
That my heart will lie peaceful and calm when I'm laid to
my rest

And the world will be better for this
That one man, scorned and covered with scars
Still strove with his last ounce of courage
To reach the unreachable star.

Miguel de Cervantes died on the same day **William Shakespeare**, **APRIL 23, 1616**, though some claim a day earlier.

In fact it was at least **eleven days earlier**, as **Catholic Spain** used the **Gregorian Calendar** (designated **NS** for "**New Style**") while **Anglican England** still used the **Julian Calendar** (designated **OS** for "**Old Style.**")

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Significance Remembered
on the Date They Occurred](#)



William Shakespeare was **born** in 1564, with his birthday being observed April 23rd, "**St. George's Day**" - **patron saint of England**.

Shakespeare was **baptized** on April 26th.

Living in Stratford-upon-Avon, **his father**, John Shakespeare, **served on the borough corporation's council** with Thomas Rogers, grandfather of **John Harvard**, namesake of the college.

William Shakespeare was most likely educated at King's New School in Stratford.

At age 18 he married 26-year-old **Anne Hathaway**.

They had three children, Susanna, Hamnet and Judith.

Hamnet died at age 11 during an outbreak of the bubonic plague.

By 1592, **Shakespeare** had moved to **London** for work.

According to English writer John Aubrey, he would travel

the 100 miles and **return to Stratford** for a period **every year**.

When **Shakespeare** retired from theater in 1613, **he returned to live in Stratford with Anne** till his death.

It is thought his **sonnet number 145** made reference to her.

Anne outlived him seven years and was buried in a grave next to his.

In London, **Shakespeare** became shareholding director of **Globe Theater**.

He wrote 38 plays which impacted **Western literature**.

They were **comedies, histories** and **tragedies**, such as:

- **Taming of the Shrew**, 1590-1591;
- **Richard III**, 1592-1593;
- **A Comedy of Errors**, 1594;
- **Romeo and Juliet**, 1595;
- **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, 1595;
- **Merchant of Venice**, 1596-1597;
- **Much Ado About Nothing**, 1598-1599;
- **Julius Caesar**, 1599;
- **As You Like It**, 1599-1600;
- **Henry V**, 1599;
- **Hamlet**, 1599-1601;
- **Twelfth Night or What You Will**, 1601;
- **Othello**, 1603-1604;
- **All's Well That Ends Well**, 1604-1605;
- **King Lear**, 1605-1606;
- **Macbeth**, 1606;
- **The Tempest**, 1610-1611.

Shakespeare quoted extensively from the **Bible**, primarily the **Geneva translation**, published in 1560.

In Hamlet, **Shakespeare** alluded to a comment in the **Preface of the Geneva Bible**.

The **Geneva Bible** was substantially based on **William Tyndale's** earlier translations of the **New Testament**, 1526, and **Old Testament Pentateuch**, 1530.

This led English language historians to state "**without Tyndale, no Shakespeare.**"

Shakespeare's interest in **Scripture** may have heightened after lodging for several years at the home of the **Mountjoy family**, who were **Protestant Huguenot refugees** that fled religious persecutions in France.

Shakespeare referenced the **Bible more than other Elizabethan playwright** -- over 1,200 times.

He quoted from **Psalms, Matthew, Job, and Genesis** so much, that scholars think **he must have had many chapters memorized**.

He cited the story of **Cain and Abel** over 25 times.

When Lady Macbeth tries to nonchalantly pass off the murder of King Duncan with the remark "a little water clears us of this deed," it is an unmistakable allusion to **Pilate**.

The doomed **King Macbeth** then copies **Israel's King Saul** by consulting a **witch before his death**.

British historian A.L. Rowse wrote in *William Shakespeare: A Biography* (NY: Harper and Row, 1963) of the **Bible's** influence on **Shakespeare**:

"Of course, the **Bible** was the ... **most discussed book of the day**: it was of all books the best seller, especially the **Genevan Bible** .. (being a) most constant and continuing influence and inspiration (**for Shakespeare.**)"

In 1584, **Sir Walter Raleigh** founded the **Roanoke settlement** in a colony he named "**Virginia**" in honor of the virgin **Queen Elizabeth I**.

In 1588, the **Spanish Armada** attempted to invade England, but was destroyed in a hurricane.

In 1590, when supply ships finally returned to **Roanoke**, they found the settlement abandoned, resulting to it being referred to as "**The Lost Colony.**"

In 1591, **Shakespeare** introduced his play, ***King Henry the Sixth***, portraying England's monarch who ruled 1422 to 1461; and 1470 to 1471; who also was the disputed King of France from 1422 to 1453.

In the play, **Shakespeare** wrote in Part II, act II, scene i, line 34:

"Blessed are the **peacemakers** on earth."

In ***King Henry the Sixth***, Part II, act II, scene i, line 66, Shakespeare wrote:

"Now, **God** be praised, that to the believing souls,
Gives light in darkness, comfort in despair!"

In scene iii, line 55, he exclaimed:

"**God** defend the right!"

In Part III, act V, scene v, line 7, **Shakespeare** penned:

"So part we sadly in this troublous world,
To meet with joy in sweet **Jerusalem.**"

In 1592-93, **William Shakespeare** wrote the play ***King Richard the Third***, portraying the life of England's monarch who ruled 1483-1485.

In the play, **Shakespeare** wrote in act I, scene iv:

"O, I have passed a miserable night,
So full of ugly sights, of ghastly dreams,
That, as I am a **Christian faithful man**,
I would not spend another such a night,
Though 'twere to but a world of happy days."

Shakespeare wrote in *King Richard the Third*, act I, scene 4:

"Before I be convict by course of law,
To threaten me with death is most unlawful.
I charge you, as you hope for any goodness,
By **Christ's dear blood shed for our grievous sins**
That you depart and lay no hands on me."

In 1595-96, **Shakespeare** wrote the play *King Richard the Second*, England's king from 1377 to 1399.

In act IV, scene i, line 97, **Shakespeare** wrote:

"Many a time hath banished Norfolk fought
For **Jesus Christ in glorious Christian field**,
Streaming the ensign of the **Christian Cross**,
And there at Venice, gave his body to that pleasant
country's earth,
And his pure soul unto **his captain Christ**,
Under whose colors he had fought so long."

In *King Richard the Second*, act IV, scene i, line 170,
Shakespeare wrote:

"So Judas did to **Christ**: but He, in twelve,
Found truth in all but one; I, in twelve thousand, none.
God save the king! Will no man say, amen?"

In *King Richard the Second*, act IV, scene i, line 239,
Shakespeare wrote:

"Some of you with Pilate wash your hands,
Showing an outward pity."

In the play, *The Merchant of Venice*, act I, scene ii, line 59, **Shakespeare** penned:

"**God** made him, and therefore let him pass for a man."

In *The Merchant of Venice*, act I, scene iii, line 99, Shakespeare wrote:

"Mark you this, Bassanio:

The devil can cite Scripture for his own purpose.

An evil soul, producing holy witness,
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
A goodly apple rotten at the heart."

In *The Merchant of Venice*, act IV, scene i, line 184, Shakespeare wrote:

"The quality of **mercy** is not strained,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from **heaven**
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blessed;
It blessed him that gives and him that takes:

Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
His scepter shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings,

But **mercy** is above this sceptered sway,
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to **God** himself,
And earthly power doth then show likest **God's**
When mercy seasons justice.

Therefore ... Though **justice** be thy plea, consider this,

That in the course of **justice**, none of us
Should see **salvation**: we do **pray for mercy**,
And that same **prayer** doth teach us all to render
The deeds of **mercy**."

In 1598, **Shakespeare** wrote ***King Henry the Fourth***,
portraying the King who ruled England from 1399 to
1413.

In part I, act i, scene 1, line 18, **Shakespeare** wrote:

"Therefore friends,
As far as to the **sepulchre of Christ**,
Whose soldier now, under whose blessed **cross**
We are impressed and engaged to fight ...
To chase these pagans in those holy fields.
Over whose acres walk'd those blessed feet,
Which fourteen hundred years ago were nail'd
For our advantage on the bitter **cross**."

Engraved in the **Library of Congress' Jefferson
Building** in the North Corridor is a quote from
Shakespeare's play ***Henry the Fourth***, pt. ii, Act iv., Sc.
7:

"IGNORANCE IS THE CURSE OF GOD, KNOWLEDGE
THE WING WHEREWITH WE FLY TO HEAVEN."

In 1598-1600, **Shakespeare** wrote ***King Henry the Fifth***,
about the King of England who ruled from 1413-1422.

In act III, scene vi, line 181, **William Shakespeare** wrote:

"We are in **God's** hand."

In ***King Henry the Fifth***, act IV, scene i, line 309,
Shakespeare wrote:

"O **God** of battles! steel my soldiers' hearts;
Possess them not with fear; take from them now

The sense of reckoning, if the opposed numbers
Pluck their hearts from them."

In his longest play, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, 1600-01*, act 3, scene I, **Shakespeare** wrote:

"To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take Arms against a Sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them: to die."

In *Hamlet*, act I, scene I, **Shakespeare** wrote:

"Some say - that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein **our Saviour's birth** is celebrated
The bird of dawning singeth all night long."

In *Hamlet*, act III, scene i, line 150, **Shakespeare** wrote:

"I have heard of your paintings too, well enough;
God has given you one face, and you make yourselves
another."

In *Hamlet*, act III, iv, line 149, **Shakespeare** wrote:

"**Confess** yourself to **heaven**;
Repent what's past; avoid what is to come."

In *Hamlet*, act V, scene i, line 84, **Shakespeare** wrote:

"A politician ... one that would circumvent **God**."

In *Hamlet*, act v, scene ii, **Shakespeare** wrote:

"Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,
And flights of **angels** sing thee to thy rest!"

William Shakespeare wrote in *Othello, the Moor of Venice, 1604-05*, act I, scene i, line 108:

"You are one of those that will not serve **God** if the devil bid you."

In ***Othello***, act II, scene iii, line 106, **Shakespeare** wrote:

"Well, **God's** above all;
and there be souls must be saved,
and there be souls must not be saved."

In ***Othello***, act II, scene iii, line 293, **Shakespeare** wrote:

"O **God!** that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains;
that we should, with joy, pleasance, revel, and applause,
transform ourselves into beasts."

In 1607, the **Jamestown Colony** was founded in **Virginia**.

The same year, **Shakespeare** wrote the play **Anthony and Cleopatra**.

One of the investors in the Virginia Company was the **Earl of Southampton**, who also financed **Shakespeare**.

In 1609, the English ship ***Sea Venture*** was sailing on the **Third Supply mission to Jamestown**, but was caught in a hurricane and **shipwrecked on the Island of Bermuda** for nine months.

This is thought to have inspired **Shakespeare** to write the play ***The Tempest*** (1610-1611).

In 1611, King James published the **King James Version** of the Bible.

In 1613, **William Shakespeare** wrote his play ***King Henry the Eighth***, about the ruler of England from 1509 to 1547.

In act III, scene ii, line 456, **Shakespeare** wrote:

"Had I but served my **God** with half the zeal I served my king, he would not in mine age have left me naked to mine enemies."

Shakespeare remarked:

"**God's** goodness hath been great to thee;
Let never day nor night unhallowed pass,
But still remember what the **Lord** hath done."

With the rise of **Puritanism** in **England**, **theaters** were considered **dens of immorality**.

At this time, **pressure** was put on **Shakespeare** to **not mention God** in his **plays**, as it was considered **taking God's name in vain** or "**casting pearls before swine**."

This led to a period where **Shakespeare** referred to **mythology**, **Greek gods**, and **the fates**, such as in ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***, 1595-1596.

Upon seeing ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** on September 29, 1662, a member of Parliament, **Samuel Pepys**, described it as "the most insipid, **ridiculous play that ever I saw**."

Puritans eventually succeeded in forcing the **Globe Theater** to close permanently in 1642, and, in 1648, they **pulled it down to the ground**.

After the **Puritan era** of Oliver Cromwell's English Commonwealth was over, and **King Charles II** was **restored** to the **English throne** in 1660, **theaters** were once again **reopened**, though **Shakespeare's Globe Theater** was **not rebuilt until 1997**.

George Orwell, in "Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool" (*Polemic*: March 1947), wrote that at the beginning of his play,

King Lear:

"Shakespeare starts by assuming that to make yourself powerless is to invite an attack. This does not mean that everyone will turn against you ... but in all probability someone will.

If you throw away your weapons, some less scrupulous person will pick them up."

In 1616, nine years after the founding of **Jamestown**, **William Shakespeare** died on his birthday, APRIL 23.

Only 52 years old at his death, he wrote in his Will:

"In the name of **God**, Amen! I, **William Shakespeare**, of Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warr., gent., in perfect health and memory, **God** be praised, do make and ordain this my last will and testament in manner and form following, that is to say,

First, I commend my soul into the hands of **God, my Creator**, hoping and assuredly believing, through the only merits of **Jesus Christ, my Saviour**, to be made partaker of **life everlasting**, and my body to the earth whereof it is made."

Carved on **Shakespeare's tomb** in Holy **Trinity Church, Stratford-on-Avon, England**, is:

"Good Friend **For Jesus Sake** Forbear,
To Digg The Dust Enclosed Heare.
Blese Be Ye Man Spares Thes Stones,
And Curst Be He Moves My Bones."

In 1872, the **City of New York** unveiled in **Central Park**, near the **Literary Walk--Poets Walk**, a statue of **William Shakespeare**.

Woodrow Wilson stated at the **300th anniversary of**

the translation of the Bible into the English Language, May 7, 1911:

"How like to the **Scripture** is all **great literature!**

What is it that entrances us when we read or witness a play of **Shakespeare?**

It is the consciousness that this **man**, this all-observing mind, **saw men of every cast and kind as they were in their habits, as they lived.**

And as passage succeeds passage we seem to see the characters of ourselves and our friends portrayed by this ancient writer, and **a play of Shakespeare** is just as modern to-day as upon the day it was penned and first enacted.

And **the Bible** is without age or date or time. It is **a picture of the human heart** displayed for all ages and for all sorts and conditions of men."

One of France's greatest writers, **Victor Hugo**, wrote in his Preface to ***Cromwell***, 1827:

"Lastly, this threefold poetry flows from **three great sources** -- the **Bible**, Homer, **Shakespeare** ...

The **Bible** before the *Iliad*, the *Iliad* before **Shakespeare.**"

Victor Hugo stated:

"**England** has two books, the **Bible** and **Shakespeare**. **England** made **Shakespeare**, but the **Bible** made **England.**"

U.S. District Court decision ***Crockett v. Sorenson*** (W.D. Va. 1983) stated:

"The First Amendment was never intended to insulate our public institutions from any mention of **God**, the **Bible** or **religion** ...

Some of the **better known works** which rely heavily on allusions from the **Bible** include ... **THE PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE**, especially *Measure for Measure* ...

Secular education imposes immediate **demands** that **the student have a good knowledge of the Bible** ...

A basic background in the **Bible** is essential to fully appreciate and understand both **Western culture** and **current events.**"

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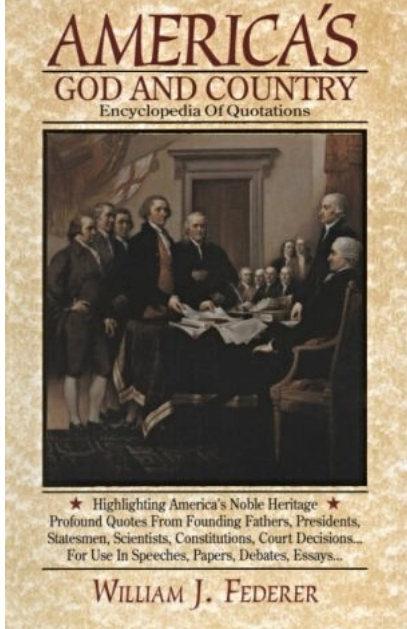
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