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Book Review: In the Hands of a Good Providence: Religion in the Life of George Washington

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Dr. Sorensen likens the role of the University President to that of a preacher, teacher, cheerleader, scholar, diplomat, warrior, peacemaker, coach and shepherd — dependent on the moment. He felt that as the state's flagship university, the university has "an obligation to be accessible to all the people of South Carolina, not just the wealthiest or most academically gifted but all the people." Toward that end he conducted annual Bowtie Bus Tours to visit and recruit students in the state. He felt that a man's skin color should be no more important than the color of his eyes and that our success as a community and as a nation was dependent on the collective success of individuals.

His plan for the university included attracting quality students, giving them the best education, and then, in partnership with the state and businesses, providing those graduates a place to work within the state. He felt that South Carolina had fallen behind in business recruitment and job creation, but that all working together could change current perceptions and make the state competitive with other regions in the county.

While seeking the strength of common goals, and applying that strength for the common good, a university president strives to make a difference that will remain after his tenure is over. From reading his words, it is obvious that USC is indeed better for Dr Sorensen's tenure and he will be long remembered.

Recommended for all in South Carolina, and any library with a collection of inspirational speeches.

Bonnie Tollifson

Thompson, Mary V. 2008. *In the Hands of a Good Providence: Religion in the Life of George Washington*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press. ISBN 978-0-8139-2763-3. \$29.95.

Already being hailed as "likely the best book that will ever be written on Washington and Christianity" (Grizzard), Mary V. Thompson's new work goes beyond the long-established and mostly unchallenged answers to questions about the first President's religious beliefs. A historian at Mt. Vernon since 1980, Mary Thompson was inspired by a simple question about Washington's religious beliefs that happened to be sent to the museum on a rare day when the researcher herself had time to delve deeply into the answer. She had always been taught to give out the standard answer, that Washington was a Deist. As she began to look further, however, she started to suspect that the actual answer was going to be much more complicated and full of nuances. Quickly developing her own interest in the topic, she began to focus her search on the primary sources available to her. These sources included a multitude of items, everything from Washington and his family's own writings (both published and unpublished), the books they owned, their financial records, local church records, their letters, and even the furnishings of their house (the author notes the possible significance of the pictures of a religious nature that were known to be displayed in the Washington home in chapter four). She analyzes together these sometimes seemingly disparate things and is able to make relevant and often innovative connections that help give a more clear picture of the Washington family's religious experience. Throughout the book, she also draws parallels between the Washington family's religious experiences and the evolution of Christianity itself in eighteenth and nineteenth century America.

Grizzard, Frank. Quote on the Publisher's Website. 2008.
<<http://www.upress.virginia.edu/books/thompson2.HTM>>.

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