

THE CASE FOR

C AMERICA'S
CHRISTIAN
HERITAGE

GARY DEMAR

The Case for America's Christian Heritage

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INTRODUCTION

Brooke Allen makes the following claim in her [article](#) “Our Godless Constitution”: “Our nation was founded not on Christian principles but on Enlightenment ones.”¹ Almost every modern critic of America’s Christian heritage argues that America was founded on Enlightenment principles. For evidence they refer to Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson and add for good measure James Madison, John Adams, and Thomas Paine as if these men were the only founders of America.

The Enlightened before the Enlightenment

Benjamin Franklin is a representative example of an Enlightenment figure. Even so, Franklin was influenced by Cotton Mather’s *Essays to do Good*, “which perhaps gave me a turn of thinking that had an influence on some of the principal future events of my life.”² Mather was a Puritan minister who believed and taught that “the power and opportunity to do good, not only gives a right to the doing of it, but makes



“I never doubted, for instance, the existence of the Deity; that he made the world, and govern’d it by his Providence; that the most acceptable service of God was the doing good to man; that our souls are immortal; and that all crime will be punished, and virtue reward, either here or hereafter.”

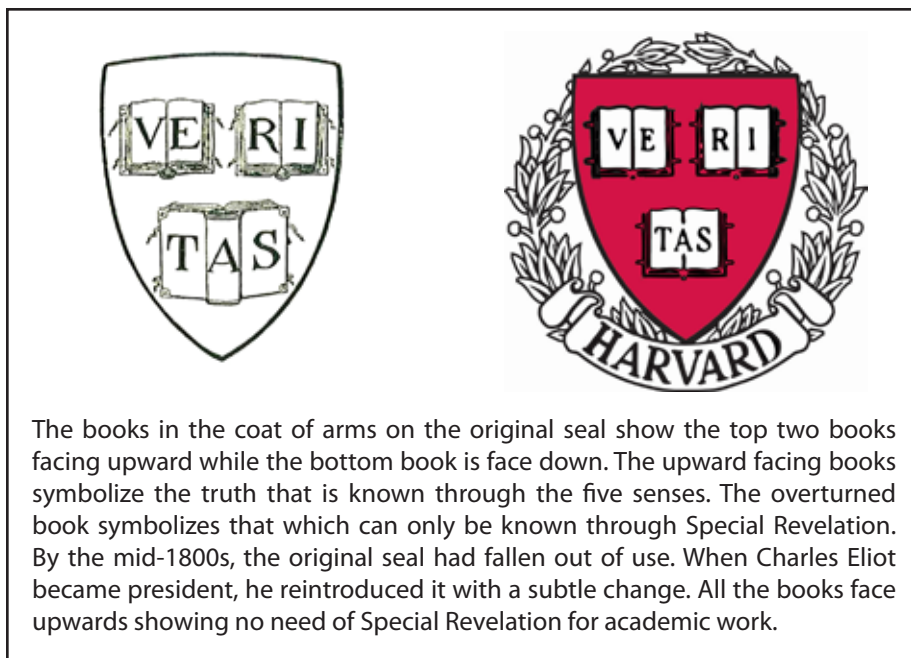
—Benjamin Franklin

the doing of it a duty.” Mather saw good works as the reasonable outworking of faith. The Bible says as much when it states “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20, KJV). Mather’s influence on Franklin can be seen in the actual wording of Franklin’s *Autobiography* where he acknowledges belief in God and resultant good works: “I never doubted, for instance, the existence of the Deity; that he made the world, and govern’d it by his Providence; that *the most acceptable service of God was the doing good to man*; that our souls are immortal; and that all crime will be punished, and virtue reward, either here or hereafter.”³ One of Franklin’s recent biographers writes:

Franklin’s belief that he could best serve God by serving his fellow man may strike some as mundane, but it was in truth a worthy creed that he deeply believed and faithfully followed.⁴

While some Enlightenment thinkers elevated reason to the position of a secular god—which the French revolutionaries did to a bloody excess—Christian thinkers understood that reason, logic, and science were a natural outworking of a biblical worldview. “The language of Europe and America had as its common feature an emphasis on calm, rational discourse, but we must not confuse this with rationalism,”⁵ the belief that reason alone could ever be the basis for all knowledge and morality. By the time someone like Franklin came along, there had been a long history of scholarship in the colonies that rested on the foundation stones of Special Revelation, rational inquiry, and scientific investigation.

Harvard, founded in 1636 by Puritans, required that students be able “to resolve [the Scriptures] Logically.”⁶ What was true of Scripture was also true of “natural philosophy,” politics, and every other area of life.⁷ The Puritans despised an “illiterate ministry.” Ministers generally were the most educated men in the colonies and served as popular educators. “No other thinker had such a wide audience as did



the preacher in his pulpit, and his printed sermons and treatises were the staple reading matter of his parishioners.”⁸ When the preacher delivered his message, the community at large was impacted by it. “On Sundays, ministers would be gospel heralds proclaiming the way of personal salvation through faith in Christ.”⁹ These same ministers would use weekdays, as the occasion required, to become “social guardians telling the nation who they were and what they must do to retain God’s special covenant interest.”¹⁰ There was duty involved in the Christian life. Preaching on the reality of sin and the promise of redemption had a broader relevance. “Since all of society fell under the mastery of God’s Word, it was necessary that there be a provision for formal presentation of the Word at every significant event in the life of the community. More than any other custom or institution, the occasional sermon symbolized New England’s claim to peculiar peoplehood and proclaimed that in all events bearing on public life, God’s Word would be preeminent.”¹¹

Reason was considered a tool, not the final arbiter of truth. Given

Enlightenment assumptions where reason was viewed as the final arbiter of what is good and right, whose version of reason would be considered ultimately reasonable? No one could say. Even so, reason was valued and necessary because it was a reflection of God's nature. The reason-alone approach was displayed in all its horrid consistency when the worst elements of the Enlightenment philosophers came full circle during the French Revolution. Heads rolled and blood flowed in the streets. America's dance with the Enlightenment was held in check by the underlying tenets of Christianity.

Cotton Mather's *The Christian Philosopher* (1721), the first systematic book on science published in America and based in part on Robert Boyle's *The Christian Virtuoso* (1690),¹² stands as ample testimony to the use of reason by Christians long before Deists and infidels made exclusive claim to it. We shouldn't forget that Mather was a forward thinking scientist who promoted inoculation for smallpox after hearing stories from African slaves and reading about success in Turkey in reports of the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society of London. It was a medical practitioner who opposed Mather and turned some clergymen against him. And it didn't help that Benjamin Franklin's brother, James, incited hostility to Mather through his new weekly newspaper the *New England Courant*. Because of



Cotton Mather's *The Christian Philosopher* (1721), stands as ample testimony to the use of reason by Christians long before Deists and infidels made exclusive claim to it.



Robert Boyle's *The Christian Virtuoso* (1690). Boyle also wrote other works showing the relationship between the Christian faith, reason, and science: *Of the High Veneration Man's Intellect owes to God, Peculiar for his Wisdom and Power* (1684) and *Discourse Of Things Above Reason, Inquiring Whether a Philosopher Should Admit There are any Such* (1681).

James Franklin's published anti-inoculation efforts, an incendiary device was thrown into Mather's house.¹³

[Benjamin Franklin] later became a fervent advocate of inoculation, painfully and poignantly espousing the cause right after his 4-year-old son, Francis, died of the pox in 1736. And he would, both as an aspiring boy of letters, end up becoming Cotton Mather's admirer and, a few years later, his acquaintance.¹⁴

Mather also experimented with plant hybridization. The publication of his *Curiosa Americana* (1712–1724) won him membership in the Royal Society of London. He wrote and published more than 400 works in his lifetime. "By the time Franklin was born, Cotton Mather had built a private library of almost three thousand volumes rich in classical and scientific as well as theological works. This appreciation of books was one of the traits shared by the Puritanism of Mather and the Enlightenment of [John] Locke,¹⁵ worlds that would combine in the character of Benjamin Franklin."¹⁶



JOHN LOCKE (1632–1704)

British philosopher regarded as one of the most influential Enlightenment thinkers.

For the record, it was Thomas Jefferson who received early training in Latin, Greek, and French from Reverend William Douglas, a Scottish clergyman. After his father's death, Jefferson continued his education with the Reverend James Maury who ran a classical academy. When Alexander Hamilton entered King's College (now Columbia University) in 1773, he was expected to have mastered Greek and Latin grammar. In addition, he had to read three orations from Cicero and Virgil's *Aeneid* in the original Latin and be able to translate the first ten chapters of the Gospel of John from Greek into Latin. The ministers of that time were very enlightened when it came to the use of reason in their studies of God and nature and the pursuit of scientific investigation.

God as a Major Player

Allen makes a second point in her article by arguing that God was a “very minor player” in the history of the founding of America. How much evidence is necessary to disprove her assertion? Of course, there is always the problem of identifying the starting point of America's founding. But even if we start with 1776 her claim is easily disproved since the Declaration includes four direct statements that reference God. Then there is the list of phrases¹⁷ that can be gleaned from the writings of the founders and the documents they drafted?:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Almighty God | 14. The Divinity |
| 2. Nature's God | 15. Supreme Disposer of All Events |
| 3. God of Armies | 16. Holy Ghost |
| 4. Lord of Hosts | 17. Jesus Christ |
| 5. His Goodness | 18. Christian Religion |
| 6. Providence | 19. Christian forbearance, love, and charity |
| 7. Providence of God | 20. Free Protestant Colonies |
| 8. God's Superintending Providence | 21. Christian State |
| 9. Supreme and Universal Providence | 22. Our Lord |
| 10. Overruling Providence of God | 23. Supreme Ruler of the Universe |
| 11. Creator of All | 24. Supreme Ruler of Nations |
| 12. Indulgent Creator | 25. God |
| 13. Great Governor of the World | |

This list alone is a direct refutation of Allen's claim. She does not name any prominent atheists during the founding era who had any impact on America's founding. She admits that Thomas Jefferson, George



EZRA STILES (1727–1795)

American academic and educator, a Congregationalist minister, theologian, author and dedicated supporter of the War for Independence. He was president of Yale College (1778-1795).

Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and even Thomas Paine believed in God. Six weeks before his death, Franklin wrote the following in a [letter](#)¹⁸ to Yale College President Ezra Stiles:

Here is my creed. I believe in one God, Creator of the universe. That he governs it by his providence. That he ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable service we render to him is doing good to his other children. That the soul of Man is immortal, and will be treated with justice in another life respecting its conduct in this. These I take to be the fundamental points in all sound religion, and I regard them as you do in whatever sect I meet with them.

It's obvious that Franklin believed in God as creator and governor of the cosmos. These are hardly the beliefs of a Deist. To choose Franklin as a champion of secularism is rather humorous given the fact that his creedal statement could not be recited in our nation's public schools because of its many religious statements. The following Regent's School Prayer was declared to be unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in the 1962 *Engel v. Vitale* decision: "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers and our Country." Franklin's credo says a great deal more, so to put him forth as a champion of secularism is the height of hypocrisy. It's true that Franklin did not believe in the deity of Jesus Christ. He made it clear, however, that he did not "dogmatise upon" the subject. He was honest enough to admit that he had "never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it now [at age 84], when I expect soon an Opportunity of knowing the Truth with less Trouble." He died six weeks later.

Allen states that Thomas Paine's "rhetoric was so fervent that he was inevitably branded an atheist." Of course, Paine was not an atheist in the usual definition of the term. His anti-Christian book *The*



“In short, monarchy and succession have laid (not this or that kingdom only) by the world in blood and ashes. ‘Tis a form of government which the word of God bears testimony against, and blood will attend it.”

—Thomas Paine

Age of Reason (1793–1794) opened with this statement: “I believe in one God.” Why Paine is singled out as a Founding Father is a mystery since he had no part in any official founding document. Paine’s later religious views forced even unorthodox men like Franklin, Jefferson, and Adams to distance themselves from the political rabble rouser who wrote the 1776 pamphlet *Common Sense*.

Allen fails to point out that Paine appealed to reason, history, and the Bible in *Common Sense*, referencing Judges 8, 1 Samuel 8, and Matthew 22:21, to make his case for independence from England. Apparently the Bible wasn’t a book of myths for him in 1776. But by the 1790s, Paine expressed a different view of the Bible and Christianity. It was because of these later writings, Allen writes, that “Jefferson got into a good deal of trouble for continuing his friendship with Paine and entertaining him at Monticello. These statesmen had to be far more circumspect than the turbulent Paine, yet if we examine their beliefs it is all but impossible to see just how theirs differed from his.” Why would these men have to worry about being identified with Paine if America’s beliefs were not fundamentally Christian? The fact is, America’s Christian heritage was rooted deeply in the nation. That’s why, for example, Jefferson got in trou-

ble for continuing his friendship with Paine after the publication of *The Age of Reason*.

Even these most skeptical of our founding fathers could not distance themselves from the root and fruit of Christianity. [Franklin](#) stood up at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787 to remind the delegates how their prayers to God had been “heard and graciously answered” in their “contest with G. Britain.” He also pointed out “that God Governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured . . . in the sacred writings, that ‘except the Lord build the House they labour in vain that build it.’ I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better, than the Builders of Babel.” These are hardly the sentiments of a Deist.

In a letter to [William Canby](#) dated September 18, 1813, Jefferson stated, “Of all the systems of morality, ancient or modern, which have come under my observation, none appear to me so pure as that of Jesus.” Of course, none of these statements and observations makes these men Christians, but it does show that the beliefs of Jefferson, Franklin, and Paine, to name just three, are far from the beliefs of members of the ACLU, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and the judiciary who rule on religious matters.

There are More than Four

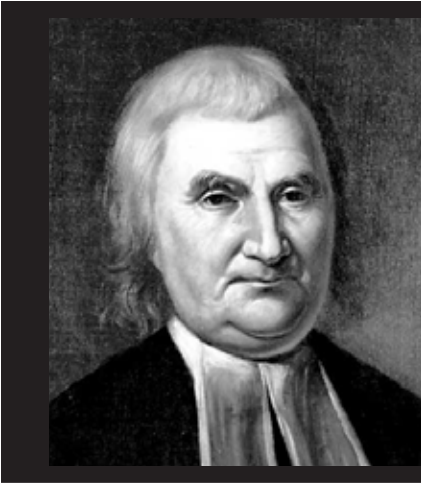
A further study of American history will show that there were many founders who were outspoken Christians who are rarely if ever mentioned by historical revisionists. Consider, for example, John Dickinson (1732–1808) who was a lawyer, militia officer during the American Revolution, Continental Congressman from Pennsylvania and Delaware, delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1787, President of Delaware, and President of Pennsylvania. On the Bible, he wrote the following:



JOHN DICKINSON (1732–1808)
Lawyer, a militia officer during the American Revolution, a Continental Congressman from Pennsylvania and Delaware, a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1787, President of Delaware, and President of Pennsylvania.

“The Holy Scriptures are able to make us wise unto Salvation, through Faith which is in Jesus Christ.” “All Scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works.” The Scriptures give a full and ample testimony to all the principle Doctrines of the Christian Faith; and therefore no Divine or inward Communication at this Day, however necessary, do or can contradict that testimony.¹⁹

There are others, all of whom signed the Constitution: Charles Pinckney and John Langdon were founders of the American Bible Society; James McHenry was founder of the Baltimore Bible Society. Rufus King helped found a Bible society for Anglicans. Abraham Baldwin served as a chaplain in the War for Independence. Roger Sherman, William Samuel Johnson, and Jacob Broom wrote on theological subjects. James Wilson and William Patterson were placed on the Supreme Court by President George Washington. They had prayer over juries in the U. S. Supreme Court room. John Witherspoon was



JOHN WITHERSPOON (1722–1794)
Presbyterian minister and
signer of the Declaration of
Independence.

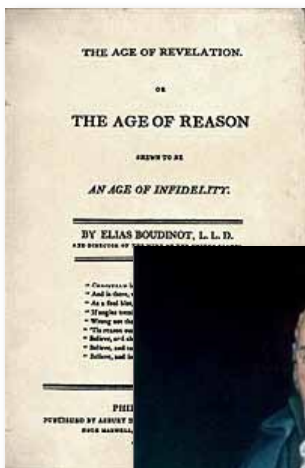
a Presbyterian minister and signed the Declaration of Independence, helped draft the Articles of Confederation, served twice in the New Jersey Legislature, and strongly supported the adoption of the United States Constitution during the New Jersey ratification debates.

Why don't these men count? Why do we only hear only of Franklin, Jefferson, Madison, and Adams? Witherspoon, like so many men of his day, believed that reason and revelation were not in opposition. "Hence arises a question," Witherspoon wrote in his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, "is it lawful, and is it safe or useful, to separate moral philosophy from religion? It will be said, it is either the same or different from revealed truth; if the *same*, unnecessary—if *different*, false and dangerous. . . . If the Scripture is true, the discoveries of reason cannot be *contrary* to it; and, therefore, it has nothing to fear from that quarter."²⁰

Many Christians of that period agreed with Witherspoon. As we've already seen, even skeptics like Franklin and Jefferson operated within the moral framework of Christianity. They, like Witherspoon, believed that reason could get a person to the same place morally as revelation. None of these men saw what was on the horizon—the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) which turned the moral universe of Franklin, Jefferson, and Witherspoon upside down.

Elias Boudinot (1740–1821), President of the Continental Congress, published the *The Age of Revelation* in 1801 which was a rebuttal to Paine’s *The Age of Reason*. In a letter to his daughter, Boudinot described his motives for writing *The Age of Revelation*:

I confess that I was much mortified to find the whole force of this vain man’s genius and art pointed at the youth of America. . . . This awful consequence created some alarm in my mind lest at any future day, you, my beloved child, might take up this plausible address of infidelity; and for want of an answer at hand to his subtle insinuations might suffer even a doubt of the truth, as it is in Jesus, to penetrate your mind I therefore determined . . . to put my thoughts on the subject of this pamphlet



on paper for your edification and information, when I shall be no more. I chose to confine myself to the leading and essential facts of the Gospel which are contradicted or attempted to be turned into ridicule by this writer. I have endeavored to detect his falsehoods and misrepresentations and to show his extreme ignorance of the Divine

Scriptures which he makes the subject of his animadversions— not knowing that “they are the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth” [Rom. 1:16].²¹

Almost no one mentions Boudinot’s response to Paine’s *Age of Reason*. And yet, unlike Paine, Boudinot actually served in a civil ca-

capacity in the United States as a United States Congressman and Director of the United States Mint from 1795 until 1805. Paine's only elective office was in France.

AMERICA'S CHRISTIAN HISTORY: FACT OR FICTION

Our Founders understood that every society is founded on some ultimate principle. Even with their unorthodox religious views—a minority opinion when compared to the majority of Founders—they understood that the “folly and wickedness of mankind,” to use Alexander Hamilton’s words, and reason alone could never serve as the stable foundation for a nation. They discounted the absolutism of a single ruler, the majority-rule concept of a pure democracy²² where the “voice of the people is considered to be the voice of God” (*vox populi, vox dei*), or an oligarchy where a self-appointed group of experts claim sovereignty and control.

A system of values (laws) always flows from a fundamental set of operating principles even among regimes as diverse as Nazism under Adolf Hitler, Communism under Lenin and Stalin, Fascism under Benito Mussolini, and Socialism. Modern-day socialists Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez claim that their socialistic system is the most rational and moral form of civil government because it is founded solely on human reason, the brotherhood of man, and a strong centrally controlled civil government that is designed for the salvation of mankind. Our Founders had no delusions about the folly of building a civil government on such a precariously laid foundation. They were



Adolph Hitler

all religious men, even the most skeptical of them. As we will see, however, the founding of America did not start in 1776, and it was not constructed by a handful of men.

[M]any of the other men who were instrumental in the Revolution and the Continental Congress were orthodox Christians, including: Patrick Henry, Sam Adams, John Hancock, John Witherspoon, Roger Sherman, and many more. These men represented viewpoints that had to be heeded by the likes of Jefferson and Madison, who were not just philosophers but also politicians who assembled coalitions. It is even clearer that *none* of these Founders was as “secular humanist”; they believed in God and that He shaped their lives and fortunes.²³

America has a long history that starts with a commitment to Jesus Christ that can be seen in the earliest charters. But like the men and women in the Bible, they were not in any way perfect in their faith or works. We can learn as much from their failures and sins as we can from their successes and acts of righteousness.

“America is Not a Nothing Country”

At a 1992 Republican governor's conference, former governor of Mississippi Kirk Fordice (1934–2004) stated that “America is a Christian nation.”²⁴ As you can imagine, many objected to the factual basis of the claim and its social, cultural, and political implications. Does a nation that rests on certain religious tenets affect the belief and value systems of those who do not identify themselves with the Christian faith? The governor's controversial remarks landed him on CNN where he repeated the claim:

Christianity is the predominant religion in America.
We all know that's an incontrovertible fact. The media



KIRK FORDICE (1934–2004)

As governor of Mississippi stated that “America is a Christian nation.”

always refer to the Jewish state of Israel. They talk about the Muslim country of Saudi Arabia, of Iran, of Iraq. We all talk about the Hindu nation of India. America is not a nothing country. It's a Christian Country.²⁵

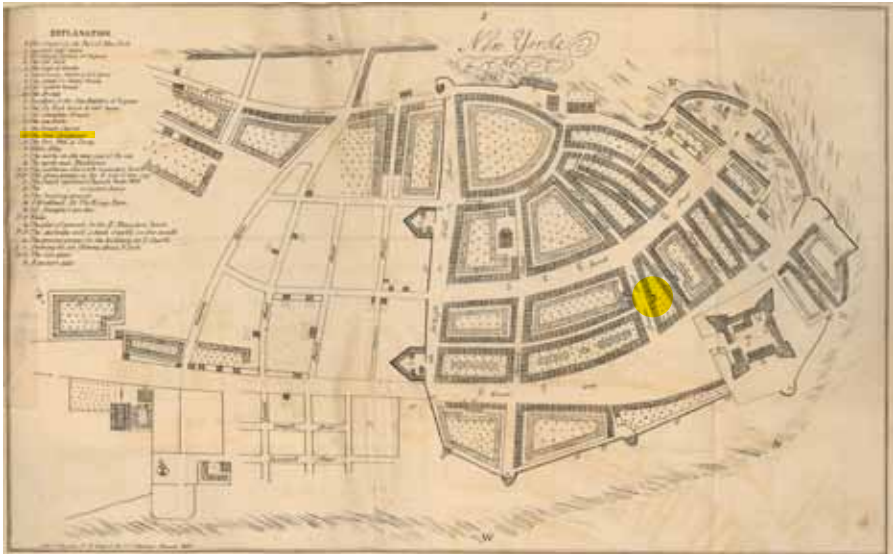
A *Washington Post* editorial²⁶ criticized Fordice for demonstrating what they believed was his historical ignorance and “‘politics of exclusion,’ suggesting he was a bigot who was ‘attempting to cut large categories of people out of the [American] process.’”²⁷ Fordice was making an appeal to the facts of history.

The debate over whether America was or is a Christian nation has not gone away. In 2006, then Senator Barack Obama stated, “Whatever we once were, we’re no longer a Christian nation. At least not just. We are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, and a Buddhist nation, and a Hindu nation, and a nation of nonbelievers.”²⁸ Stated this way, America has always been made up of people who have held diverse religious opinions. Joachim Gans, an English metallurgist and Jewish, was recruited by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1585 to join an expedition to explore the Virginia territory. He later returned to England in 1586.

Solomon Franco, a Sephardic Jew from Holland, is believed to have settled in the city of Boston in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1649. A map of New York, dated 1695, shows the location of a Jewish

synagogue on Beaver Street (no. 14 on the map below).²⁹ The first major Jewish settlement was in Newport, Rhode Island. The Touro Synagogue was constructed in 1762 and dedicated in 1763. It is the only surviving synagogue built in colonial America. George Washington wrote a letter of commendation to the congregation on August 21, 1790 in which he stated the following:

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.³⁰



But there is no doubt that the majority of the earliest settlers to these shores were Protestant Christians. Of course, there were also unbelievers and probably even some Hindus and Buddhists in early America. While America is the most religiously diverse nation in the world today, it was Christianity that shaped America's founding.

The Ideals and Values of a Nation

In 2009, President Obama made these comments while in Turkey where 99 percent of the population is Muslim:

“Although . . . we have a very large Christian population, we do not consider ourselves a Christian nation or a Jewish nation or a Muslim nation; we consider ourselves a nation of citizens who are bound by ideals and a set of values.”³¹

Turkey does consider itself a Muslim nation even though it has a relatively secular government because nearly everyone in the nation is a Muslim and its value system is based on Islamic principles. Here's the question that goes to the heart of the Christian nation debate: What is the origin of the “ideals” and “set of values” that the citizens of the United States acknowledge and ultimately obey?

A lack of historical knowledge of the role the Christian religion played in the founding of America is rampant. Rob Thomas, front man for the band Matchbox 20, goes beyond the usual claim that our nation's founders were deists to argue that they were atheists:

I believe that America is a great nation of even greater people. I also believe that anyone who says that this is a “Christian nation” has RHS, or revisionist history syndrome, and doesn't realize that most of our founding fathers were either atheist or at least could see, even in the 1700s, that all through Europe at the time, religion was the cause of so much persecution that

they needed to put into their brand new constitution a SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE so that the ideals of a group of people could never be forced onto the whole.³²

Definitions are important in debates. If “Christian nation” is defined in terms of how many Christians there were at America’s founding, then America was a Christian nation. President Obama acknowledges this when he said, “Whatever we once were, we’re no longer a Christian nation.” If population is the determining factor, then America is still a Christian nation. But it’s more than this.

What Others Have Said

If we look at how others have assessed America’s Christian heritage, we can see a similar definitional trend. Terry Eastland, publisher of *The Weekly Standard*, has confirmed the following after an in-depth study of the history of America. “Protestant Christianity has been our established religion in almost every sense of that phrase. . . . The establishment of Protestant Christianity was one not only of law but also, and far more importantly, of culture. Protestant Christianity supplied the nation with its ‘system of values.’”³³ This



FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT described the United States as “the lasting concord between men and nations, founded on the principles of Christianity.”

statement of historical fact, inscribed into law by the United States Supreme Court, etched into charters and state constitutions, and echoed by presidents and governors for nearly four centuries, clashes with modern-day secular assumptions and the unanchored ideals of multiculturalism, political correctness, and moral relativism. James Billington, Librarian of the United States Congress, said in a news conference on the opening of the exhibit “Religion and the Founding of the American Republic,” that “the dominant role religion played in the earliest days of this country is largely ignored by media, academics and others.”³⁴

America's Christian roots run deep and wide throughout the landscape of our nation's history. At every point in our nation's past, America's Christian heritage can be seen at nearly every turn through the voluminous historical records that have been painstakingly preserved. And beyond the proof inscribed in the official story of America, there is the abundant anecdotal evidence that surfaces from every corner of the globe. For example:

In 1931 the U.S. Supreme Court noted that the United States is a Christian nation. In a mid-Atlantic summit with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in the darkest hours of World War II, President Roosevelt—who had described the United States as “the lasting concord between men and nations, founded on the principles of Christianity”—asked the crew of an American warship to join him in a rousing chorus of the hymn “Onward, Christian Soldiers.”

In 1947, writing to Pope Pius XII, President Truman said flatly, “This is a Christian nation.”

Nobody argued with any of them.³⁵

If any president made such claims today, he would be derided by a hostile press and mocked by academic elitist in the highly charged

atmosphere of political correctness that has imbedded itself into discussion forums at every level of our society. So would former presidents Woodrow Wilson and Jimmy Carter. In his famous address, "The Bible and Progress," delivered in Denver, Colorado, on May 7, 1911, President Wilson told his audience that "America was born a Christian nation. America was born to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of Holy Scripture."³⁶ As a presidential candidate Jimmy Carter told reporters in June of 1976 that "We have a responsibility to try to shape government so that it does exemplify the will of God."³⁷

Chief Justice Earl Warren (1891–1974), who led the way in gaining a unanimous opinion in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, made the following remarks about the role that Christianity played in the founding of America:

I believe no one can read the history of our country without realizing that the Good Book and the spirit of the Savior have from the beginning been our guiding geniuses. Whether we look to the first charter of Virginia or to the Charter of New England . . . or to the Charter of Massachusetts Bay or to the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut . . . the same objective is present: A Christian land governed by Christian principles.



CHIEF JUSTICE EARL WARREN (1891–1974) stated: "I believe the entire Bill of Rights came into being because of the knowledge our forefathers had of the Bible and their belief in it..."

I believe the entire Bill of Rights came into being because of the knowledge our forefathers had of the Bible and their belief in it: freedom of belief, of expression, of assembly, of petition, the dignity of the individual, the sanctity of the home, equal justice under law, and the reservation of powers to the people. . . .

I like to believe we are living today in the spirit of the Christian religion. I like also to believe that as long as we do so, no great harm can come to our country.³⁸



A 1982 article in *Newsweek* Magazine stated the following: “[F]or centuries [the Bible] has exerted an unrivaled influence on American culture, politics and social life. Now historians are discovering that the Bible perhaps even more than the Constitution, is our founding document.”³⁹ Time magazine said something similar in 1987: “Ours is the only country deliberately founded on a good idea. That good idea combines a commitment to man’s inalienable rights with the Calvinist belief in an ultimate moral right and sinful man’s obligation to do good. These articles of faith, embodied in the Declaration of Independence and in the Constitution, literally govern our lives today.”⁴⁰

Our nation's values were rooted in the Bible. Of course, this does not mean that all Christian Americans followed the biblical precepts that they claimed to believe.

Even those who would generally dismiss the Bible as a standard of moral righteousness and reject the "Christian nation" designation cannot help themselves from appealing to the Bible when it suits their purpose. An editorial in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* cited the words of Jesus to "love your enemies" as a moral prescription against torture.⁴¹ Good for them. I wonder if the same editors are ready to adopt Jesus' definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman (Matt. 19:4–6). The governor of the state of Alabama wanted to raise taxes in the state based on the article "An Argument for Tax Reform Based on Judeo-Christian Ethics" that appeared in the *Alabama Law Review*.⁴²

A great deal of the editorial savagery leveled against Governor Fordice could have been alleviated if the historical record had been studied in an objective way. But even this would not have been enough. Facts are not the problem. There is often a bias against things Christian. Religion is fine, say the secularists, as long as it remains a private affair and does not spill over into the areas of morality, education, and politics unless it can be used to support some secular cause. But this is not the America of history.

What It is Not

The claim that America has a distinct Christian heritage does not mean that *every* American is now or ever was a Christian. Moreover, it does not mean that either the Church or the State should force people to profess belief in Christianity or attend religious services. Furthermore, a belief in a Christian heritage for America does not mean that non-Christians, and for that matter, dissenting Christians, cannot hold contrary opinions in a climate of a general Christian consensus.

What It Is

It's one thing to claim that there is no evidence of a Christian heritage for America and prove it. It's another thing to fabricate history to suit one's entrenched presuppositions. An honest study of America's past will show that a majority of Americans shared a common religion and set of values. America's earliest founders were self-professed Christians, and their founding documents expressed a belief in a Christian worldview. John Winthrop's sermon aboard the *Arbella* in 1630 is one piece of evidence supporting this historical truth.

For the persons, we are a Company professing ourselves fellow members of Christ. . . .

For the work we have in hand, it is by a mutual consent through a special overruling providence, and a more than an ordinary approbation of the Churches of Christ to seek out a place of Cohabitation and Consortship under a due form of Government both civil and ecclesiastical. . . .⁴³

Freedom and liberty, ideals cherished by all Americans, were rooted in a biblical moral order. Liberty was not license. Freedom was not the right always to do what one pleased. Winthrop's definition of liberty is far from the modern meaning. As it is usually defined today, liberty is freedom *from* moral restraints. One is not truly free, according to the contemporary use of the term, if one is bound by any moral code.

A Foreigner's View

In 1831 the French social philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville landed in America to observe the new nation and her institutions. Tocqueville's work was published in two parts at the mid-point of the nineteenth century as *Democracy in America*. It has been described as "the most comprehensive and penetrating analysis of the rela-

tionship between character and society in America that has ever been written.”⁴⁴ His observations on America's moral ideals are revealing and worthy of study.

The sects that exist in the United States are innumerable. They all differ in respect to the worship which is due to the Creator; but they all agree in respect to the duties which are due from man to man. Each sect adores the Deity in its own peculiar manner, *but all sects preach the same moral law* in the name of God. . . . Moreover, all the sects of the United States are comprised within the great unity of Christianity, and *Christian morality is everywhere the same. . . . [T]here is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America.*⁴⁵

Two-hundred years after John Winthrop's sermon aboard the *Arbella*, Tocqueville continued to find in America “an ostensible respect for Christian morality and virtue.”⁴⁶ This is the substance of a working definition of “Christian America”—the sharing of common moral values that have been shaped with reference to the Bible. “The biblical model of a ‘city on a hill,’” to use Winthrop's phrase, “was the



ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE (1805–1859)
Author of *Democracy in America* (1835), stated: “. . . . [T]here is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America..”

relevant goal for political action. Puritan divines called for the establishment of a 'Holy Community,' governed according to standards derived from Christian principles of morality and justice."⁴⁷

The Supreme Court Has Spoken

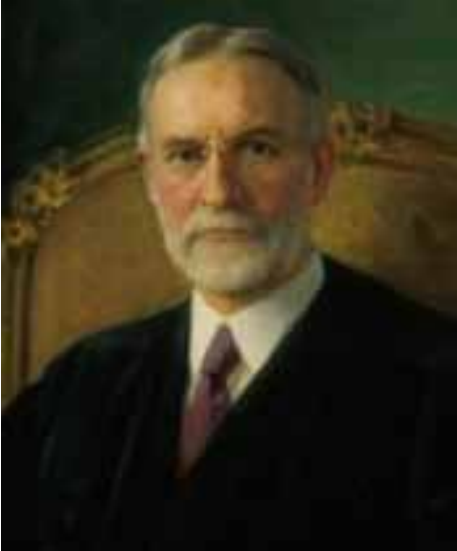
For many American's official recognition of anything is found in the Supreme Court. So what has the highest court in land determined? In 1892, the Supreme Court declared in the case of *The Church of the Holy Trinity vs. United States*, that America was a Christian nation from its earliest days. After examining a full range of historical documents, Associate Justice David J. Brewer [see Luis] concluded that Americans are "a religious people. This is historically true. From the discovery of this continent to the present hour, there is a single voice making this affirmation." Beginning with Ferdinand and Isabella's commission to Christopher Columbus through a survey of then current state constitutions, the court concluded:

There is no dissonance in these declarations. There is a universal language pervading them all, having one meaning; they affirm and reaffirm that this is a religious nation. These are not individual sayings, declarations of private persons: they are organic utterances; they speak the voice of the entire people.

If we pass beyond these matters to a view of American life as expressed by its laws, its business, its customs and its society, we find everywhere a clear recognition of the same truth. Among other matters note the following: The form of oath universally prevailing, concluding with an appeal to the Almighty; the custom of opening sessions of all deliberative bodies and most conventions with prayer; the prefatory words of all wills, "In the name of God, amen"; the laws respecting the observance of the Sabbath, with the general cessation of all secular busi-

ness, and the closing of courts, legislatures, and other similar public assemblies on that day; the churches and church organizations which abound in every city, town and hamlet; the multitude of charitable organizations existing everywhere under Christian auspices; the gigantic missionary associations, with general support, and aiming to establish Christian missions in every quarter of the globe. These, and many other matters which might be noticed, add a volume of unofficial declarations to the mass of organic utterances that this is a Christian nation.⁴⁸

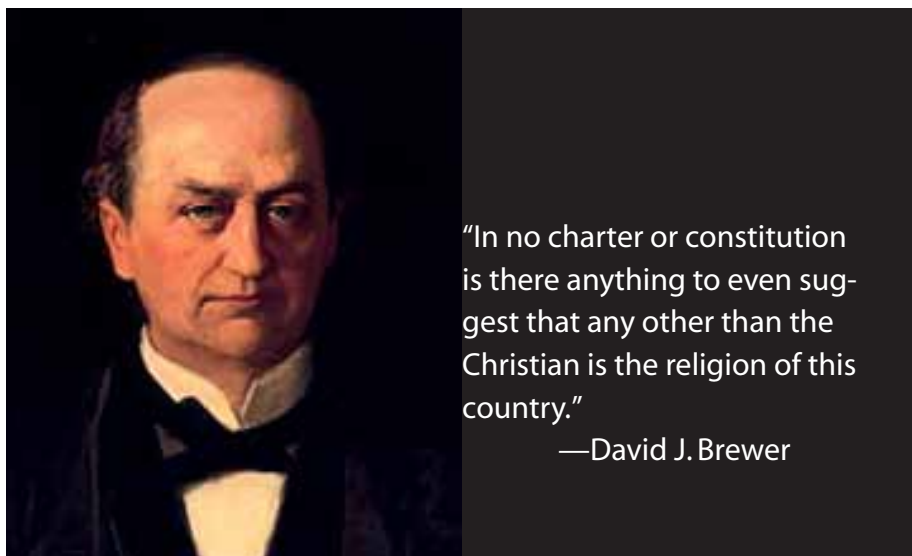
In 1931, Supreme Court Justice George Sutherland reviewed the 1892 decision and reaffirmed that Americans are a “Christian people.” As late as 1952, even the liberal Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas declared that “we are a religious people and our institutions presuppose a Supreme Being.”



In 1931, Supreme Court Justice George Sutherland reviewed the 1892 decision and reaffirmed that Americans are a “Christian people.”

In addition to writing the opinion in the *Holy Trinity* case, David Brewer wrote *The United States: A Christian Nation*, a series of lectures that were published in book form in 1905 while he was still

a member of our nation's highest court?⁴⁹ In it, Brewer reiterates the history behind the 1892 *Trinity* case and states clearly that America was founded as a Christian nation, as the following citations from his book indicate:



- "This republic is classified among the Christian nations of the world."
- "In the case of Holy Trinity Church vs. United States, 143 U.S. 471, that court, after mentioning various circumstances, add, 'these and many other matters which might be noticed, add a volume of unofficial declarations to the mass of organic utterances that this is a Christian nation.'"
- "[W]e constantly speak of this republic as a Christian nation—in fact, as the leading Christian nation in the world. This popular use of the term certainly has significance. It is not a mere creation of the imagination. It is not a term of derision but has a substantial basis—one which justifies its use."

- “In no charter or constitution is there anything to even suggest that any other than the Christian is the religion of this country. In none of them is Mohammed or Confucius or Buddha in any manner noticed. In none of them is Judaism recognized other than by way of toleration of its special creed. While the separation of church and state is often affirmed, there is nowhere a repudiation of Christianity as one of the institutions as well as benedictions of society. In short, there is no charter or constitution that is either infidel, agnostic, or anti-Christian. Wherever there is a declaration in favor of any religion it is of the Christian.”
- “You will have noticed that I have presented no doubtful facts. Nothing has been stated which is debatable. The quotations from charters are in the archives of the several States; the laws are on the statute books; judicial opinions are taken from the official reports; statistics from the census publications. In short, no evidence has been presented which is open to question.”
- “I could show how largely our laws and customs are based upon the laws of Moses and the teachings of Christ; how constantly the Bible is appealed to as the guide of life and the authority in questions of morals.”

David Brewer's conclusion?—“This is a Christian nation.” Our study would be incomplete if we did not take the same road that David Brewer and others have taken to come to their conclusions. A look at all the available evidence must be considered.

NOTES

1. Brooke Allen, "Our Godless Constitution," *The Nation* (February 21, 2005).
2. Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. John Bigelow (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott & Co., 1868), 92.
3. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 211. Emphasis added.
4. Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 492.
5. Rousas J. Rushdoony, "The Myth of an American Enlightenment," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Symposium on Christianity and the American Revolution, ed. Gary North, 3:1 (Summer 1976), 670.
6. Samuel Eliot Morison, *Founding of Harvard College* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 337.
7. Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Were* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie/Zondervan, 1986).
8. Richard B. Schlatter, *The Social Ideas of Religious Leaders, 1660–1688* (New York: Octagon Books, [1940] 1971), v.
9. Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 27.
10. Stout, *The New England Soul*, 27.
11. Stout, *The New England Soul*, 27.
12. The use of *Virtuoso* by Boyle (1627–1691) has the meaning of "natural philosopher" or "naturalist," what we would call today a scientist. In addition to *The Christian Virtuoso*, Boyle also wrote other works showing the relationship between the Christian faith, reason, and science: *Of the High Veneration Man's Intellect owes to God, peculiar for his Wisdom and Power* (1684) and *Discourse Of Things Above Reason, inquiring whether a Philosopher should admit there are any such* (1681).
13. Laurence Farmer, "When Cotton Mather Fought the Smallpox," *American Heritage Magazine* 8:5 (August 1957): www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1957/5/1957_5_40.shtml
14. Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin*, 24.

15. In addition to writing his two-volume work *An Essay on Human Understanding*, Locke wrote “*The Reasonableness of Christianity*” with “*A Discourse on Miracles*” and a part of “*A Third Letter Concerning Toleration*.” See Gary T. Amos, *Defending the Declaration: How the Bible and Christianity Influenced the Writing of the Declaration of Independence* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt Publishers, 1989).
16. Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin*, 24.
17. Anson Phelps Stokes and Leo Pfeffer, *Church and State in the United States*, one-vol. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 561–565.
18. March 9, 1790
19. John Dickinson, “Religious Instruction for Youth,” undated. R.R. Logan Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.” Quoted in James H. Hutson, ed., *The Founders on Religion: A Book of Quotations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 24.
20. John Witherspoon, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* (Philadelphia: William W. Woodward, 1822), 5
21. Elias Boudinot, *The Age of Revelation, or the Age of Reason Shewn to be An Age of Infidelity* (Philadelphia: Asbury Dickins, 1801), xii–xiv.
22. “From this view of the subject it may be concluded that a pure democracy, by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person, can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction. A common passion or interest will, in almost every case, be felt by a majority of the whole; a communication and concert result from the form of government itself; and there is nothing to check the inducements to sacrifice the weaker party or an obnoxious individual. Hence it is that such democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths. Theoretic politicians, who have patronized this species of government, have erroneously supposed that by reducing mankind to a perfect equality in their political rights, they would, at the same time, be perfectly equalized and assimilated in their possessions, their opinions, and their passions.” ([The Federalist No. 10](#): “The Utility of the Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection.” November 22, 1787 [James Madison]).
23. Steven Waldman, *Founding Faith: Providence, Politics, and the Birth of Religious Freedom in America* (New York: Random House, 2008), 192.

24. *U.S. News & World Report* (November 30, 1992), 21.
25. "Mississippi Governor Criticized for 'Christian Nation' Remark," *Dallas/Fort Worth Heritage* (January 1993), 14. Quoted in John W. Whitehead, *Religious Apartheid: The Separation of Religion from American Public Life* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), 149.
26. November 19, 1992.
27. David t. Moore, *Five Lies of the Century* Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995), 3.
28. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmC3IevZiik> (2007)
29. "It was not until 1730 that the Congregation was able to build a synagogue of its own; it was built on Mill Street in lower Manhattan. Before 1730, as is evidenced from a map of New York from 1695, the congregation worshipped in rented quarters on Beaver Street and subsequently on Mill Street."
30. George Washington, "[George Washington's Response to Moses Seixas](#)" (August 21, 1790).
31. Quoted in Lynn Sweet, "[Obama and President Gul of Turkey Press Conference. Obama's Islamic outreach](#)," *Chicago Sun Times* (April 6, 2009).
32. Rob Thomas, "[The Big Gay Chip on My Shoulder](#)," *The Huffington Post* (May 27, 2009).
33. Terry Eastland, "In Defense of Religious America," *Commentary: A Monthly Publication of the American Jewish Committee* (June 1981), 39–41.
34. Quoted in Bill Broadway, "One Nation Under God," *The Washington Post* (June 6, 1998), B9.
35. Larry Witham, "'Christian Nation' Now Fighting Words: Fordice Fumbles in PC Territory," *The Washington Times* (November 23, 1992), A1.
36. *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Arthur S. Link, 57 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), 23:12–20. Quoted in Richard V. Pierard and Robert D. Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie/Zondervan, 1988), 153.
37. Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr., *God in the White House: How Religion Has Changed the Modern Presidency* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 1.
38. Former Chief Justice Earl Warren, addressing the annual prayer breakfast of

the International Council of Christian Leadership, 1954. Quoted in Jim Nelson Black, *When Nations Die: Ten Warning Signs of a Culture in Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 253.

39. Kenneth L. Woodward, "How the Bible made America," *Newsweek* (December 27, 1982), 44.
40. *Time* (May 25), 1987.
41. "Do unto others," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (May 23, 2009), B6.
42. Susan Pace Hamill, "An Argument for Tax Reform Based on Judeo-Christian Ethics," *Alabama Law Review* 54:1 (Fall 2002), 1–112.
43. John Winthrop (1588-1649), "A Model of Christian Charity," (1630), quoted in Mark A. Noll, ed., *Eerdmans' Handbook to Christianity in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 38.
44. Robert N. Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), viii.
45. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 1:303. Emphasis added.
46. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1:305.
47. A. James Reichley, *Religion in American Public Life* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1985), 55.
48. *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States*. Argued and submitted January 7, 1892. Decided February 29, 1892. Justice Brewer delivered the opinion of the court.
49. David J. Brewer, *The United States: A Christian Nation* (Philadelphia, PA: The John C. Winston Company, 1905). The book has been reprinted under the same title by American Vision, P.O. Box 220, Powder Springs, GA 30127.