

IS AMERICA A CHRISTIAN NATION?
AN ARGUMENT FOR A LEGALLY
SECULAR STATE

by

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ABSTRACT

In this project, I will analyze the foundation of the United States of America in terms of the role played by the Christian religion, and whether our nation was intended to be “Christian” in any legal sense. I will primarily analyze the Constitution as a rhetorical document: the set of values it establishes for the nation, what it says about religion and its role in our nation/government, any undertones (legal or moral) that may ring of Christianity, etc. I will look at two U.S. Supreme Court cases in order to see where our nation’s highest court stands on the issue of Church and State mixing. I will also analyze the personal beliefs, writings and political activities of five the men who founded our nation—James Madison, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and George Washington. Lastly, I will look at a film, *Jesus Camp*, in order to discuss some of the rhetoric of those who claim that America is in every sense a Christian nation. The purpose of this project will be to create as definitive a claim as possible that the United States is in no way a Christian nation, in legal terms, nor should it be considered thus.

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INTRODUCTION

At the Stock Show and Rodeo in Fort Worth, Texas, there is a splendid “Grand Entry” before every rodeo begins. Well-known local businessmen and politicians ride out on their horses to be announced, followed by law enforcement officers, notable rodeo supporters and patrons, banner men and women wielding the “Six flags of Texas” and others. This ceremony is followed by a dimming of the lights to assemble the setting for the introduction of the singing of the Star Spangled Banner, which is often dubbed by the M.C. as “the greatest song ever written.” He goes on to tell the spectators an anecdote that varies with each rodeo, from stories of military men he has met, to close friends or relatives and other people he has become acquainted with over the years. The commonality that these tales share is each of his subject’s discovering faith in God and in His son, Jesus Christ, and of their reliance upon that faith. His closing line before announcing the National Anthem is almost always as follows: “Because, Ladies and Gentlemen, this is One Nation Under God—always has been, always will be.”

In their book, *The Godless Constitution*, Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore say that “some Americans have inherited extravagant hopes about what religion, specifically Christianity, may accomplish in solving social problems through moral instruction” (11). Those Americans, who number in the millions, would agree with the M.C. of the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo. We hear God invoked in our leaders’ speeches; we see God on our currency; we hear God in a number of our nation’s iconic songs; dotted across our landscape are private universities and organizations that have some religious word or implication in their name, or have religion reflected in the way they do business; we see more churches than McDonald’s—roughly nineteen churches

for every one of the chain's restaurants (Cooke). The Christian religion permeates our society, and evidence of it is everywhere.

Kramnick and Moore go on to say that "others look to a different legacy, one that suggests how easily partisan religion in the hands of a purported majority can become a dangerous form of intellectual and political tyranny" (11). Though they are smaller in number, there are many who agree with this claim by Kramnick and Moore, and would thus differ from the claim of the rodeo's M.C. They would concede we are a nation whose majority populace is Christian, but that does not suffice to make us "One Nation Under God." Freedom of Religion is one basic freedom that we undeniably have, and certainly one that we hold very dearly; furthermore, it ensures that no one religion shall rule over our nation, and surely will not dictate our political policies. These people believe such a theocracy would be a dangerous thing indeed. They argue that we are a nation of diverse beliefs, one whose morals and laws are based not upon the Bible but upon Reason, that innate dictate invoked as our primary ethical directive by philosophers of old such as Aristotle and Socrates, and again centuries later by the likes of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. They argue that religion is not the origin of our moral and legal obligations, but merely a conduit that has lumped them together in a book.

I firmly hold a secular reading of the Constitution, and by extension a secularly established and secularly motivated government, to be true. In this paper, I will analyze the foundation of the United States of America in terms of the role played by the Christian religion in hopes of establishing and defending my claim. As both the "Christian America" side and the "Secular America" side often quote the Constitution as the chief defense of their positions, that document will be the primary subject of my

analysis: the set of values it establishes for the nation, what it says about religion and its role in our nation/government and any legal and moral undertones that may ring of Christianity.

I will also address two Supreme Court cases that have dealt with the relationship between religion and government. This will highlight our highest court's interpretation of these vital parts of the Constitution, show how they have applied them over recent years and thus clarify the legal limits of religion in public and political matters. I will look at the landmark decisions of *McCullum v. Board of Education* and *Lemon v. Kurtzman*. Cases such as these have established precedents to which our current Supreme Court refer in nearly any case dealing with the relationship between Church and State, and will stand to further bolster the stance of those with a secular view of our nation's legal and political system.

I will furthermore take a look at the personal religious beliefs of some of the men who constructed the Constitution and how those beliefs may have influenced the design of the document, implicitly or otherwise. Other figures will be considered, though not for their direct hand in writing the constitution, but rather for the pivotal roles they played in America's founding: Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and John Adams. If we are to closely examine our nation's roots, then we should not ignore the men who planted the seeds.

Lastly, I will take a brief look at a film, *Jesus Camp*, as a blatant violation of the America for which I argue in this project. In it we will see certain people's reliance upon their emotional arguments and ability to brainwash children, while they turn a blind eye to logic such as I will present throughout my work. These people should not be ignored,

for they are a heavy force in modern political discourse, and are fueled by a passion that they justify with a higher power.

The significance of this project's nature should not be understated. As a brief example, consider the recent resurgence of the Tea Party. As a very adamantly Christian sect of the Republican Party, I think it is appropriate to consider the legality and ethics of part of their political strategy. It can be said that the Tea Party bully many Christians into voting against their best socioeconomic interests by coercing them into voting for a Tea Party candidate based upon said candidate's faith. Many politicians claim God has called them into public service (and also out of it in cases such as Michelle Bachmann) where they may do the most good, and lead our nation as God intended it be led. Though this thesis will not be a direct attack on such political institutions, it will refute such a normative claim, that our nation should adhere to and be led by a religious dogma.

Not only will this project discuss the degree to which Christianity does affect our governmental policies, but it will also argue how much Christianity *should* affect them. A closer look into the influence of Christianity's effects on public policy cannot help but clear some of the murky waters of politics, and it is to the benefit of any citizen to better understand the ethics, laws, and practices of her nation. I believe our nation is the least secular of all developed western countries. In order to achieve a greater understanding of what it means to be a citizen of America, it is nothing short of pertinent to look at the roots of our nation and its bedrock document of law to see whether the United States' apparent willfulness to keep religion in our political bloodstream is supported by our foundation. In undertaking this project, I will thoroughly analyze both the religious and secular dispositions for which America was established to embody. I will give fair time to

both the Christian America and Secular America sides, present their best arguments and defend why I believe a secular reading of the Constitution to be the right one.

THE CONSTITUTION AND WHAT IT SAYS ABOUT RELIGION

In order to answer the question of whether Christianity plays a role in the United States Constitution, and by extension in all the laws of the nation, we must first look and see what is said in the Constitution itself. The simple answer is: not much. In fact, there are only two places in the Constitution in which religion is mentioned at all: Article VI and the First Amendment. That said, this section will not be so much a discussion of the motives behind what is said in the Constitution regarding religion; rather, it will simply look at what is said in these two specific places, and analyze some interpretations thereof. The debate over how to interpret religion via the Constitution is still a topic in politics and law every day, for each person who undertakes this task has their mind set on the America they believe and want to exist. This will be a look at what is explicitly laid out in the document, and a logical analysis thereof.

In their book, Kramnick and Moore repeatedly refer to the Constitution as a “godless document,” due to its utter lack of references to any particular religion or god (28). John Adams described the Constitution as “if not the greatest exertion of human understanding, [then] the greatest single effort of national deliberation that the world has ever seen” (Kramnick and Moore, 27). Due to the lack of any Christian direction, however, many did not share his enthusiasm for the legal document.

The first mention of religion in the Constitution is found in Article VI, which simply states, “No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States” (US Constitution, Art. VI). This clause was boldly

contested by many of the officials from the thirteen colonies. It is easy to understand why: Not only did the representatives at the Constitutional Convention have their own strong religious convictions (not to mention prejudices against other religions), but their prior experiences with American law/policy were not so vacant of references to God. In The Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson invoked “The Creator” as having granted men their now-famous “inalienable Rights” (US Declaration of Ind.). The Articles of Confederation—the nation’s first attempt at a legal framework for the new nation—mentioned “the Great Governor of the World” (Art. of the Confed., Sec. XIII). In 1787, eleven of the original thirteen states’ constitutions cited religious requirements of some sort as requisite for holding public office, in spite of the clear omission of it in the federal equivalent (Kramnick and Moore 29-30). However, the necessity that the Founding Fathers saw for this article is clear enough. To allow religious tests for our leaders is to assign religious requisites, which in turn implies that our nation will be led by that religion. If a political leader is to be tested for a certain faith, then does it not follow that he or she is expected to apply that faith to his or her decisions while in office? This seems to be a slippery slope towards a religion-driven government, which I do not believe is not what our founders had in mind.

The Constitution’s second address of religion comes in the Founding Fathers’ first major overhaul of the document. It may be firmly argued that the Amendments were written by order of importance, which will be briefly addressed in the later section devoted to the Founding Fathers. That said, I do believe it speaks to the great presence of the issue of the relationship of Church and State that religion was foremost when the Amendments were penned. The First Amendment’s text follows:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of Religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances. (US Constitution, Amendment I, emphasis added)

The first clause therein (italicized) is obviously the most important to the matter at hand, but the remainder of the amendment does have a role to play as well. Freedom of speech, the press and to assemble in protest and petition are all basic rights we as Americans accept and understand as some of our most important. This aligns with our freedom to practice (or not practice) whatever religion we want, and our freedom from religious persecution and oppression. While the earlier centuries' recipe of religious persecution was categorized by slaughter and execution—and still are in certain places in the world, along with acts of domestic and international terrorism—today's sources of persecution, in America, are more accurately embodied in social issues: ongoing debates about abortion, contraception, gay marriage, etc. To many, the idea behind the First Amendment was to be sure that religion played no role in politics and policymaking. The voting populace was not to account for one's faith (or lack thereof) when judging his or her merits as a leader. Furthermore, the Amendment meant to ensure that reason, and not religion, would be our leaders' sole guide to establish fair and just laws.

However, in history and in modern discourse, many believe the First Amendment's purpose is to ensure religious freedom from the government, period. These people argue that any interpretation of the amendment that steers towards a secular government is an unfounded attack to remove God from public life. Given their beliefs, it

is easy to see why these people would also take such an interpretation as a personal attack on their religion, and thus a violation of their religious freedom. As I have already mentioned, they see Christianity in particular as the only vehicle for “solving social problems through moral instruction” (Kramnick and Moore, 11). Therefore, any move toward removing it entirely from political process would be seen by them as a step away from an ethically sound nation.

I take the more secular interpretation to be the intention of the First Amendment, and believe the text to be in favor of that interpretation. If “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of Religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” then it is plain enough that no laws should encourage or inhibit any one religion in regard to another. To do so would be to consciously show preference to the beliefs and teachings of that one religion, something that the Founding Fathers wished to avoid because of history’s lessons of theocratic governments.

As we will see in a later section, the Founding Fathers had enormous respect for religious faith, and many of them believed basic human rights to be divinely endowed. Despite this, upon revisiting and editing the United States’ bedrock legal document, they saw it to be necessary to begin with a clause that forbids any interference of religion by government and vice versa, or any over-entanglement of the two (we will revisit this upon discussing *Lemon v. Kurtzman*). It therefore follows that any desire they had for a legal separation of Church and State was certainly not a matter of personal vendetta against or distrust of religion in general (specifically Christianity); rather, I believe it demonstrates an acute awareness of the political and legal immiscibility of the two. This claim will also be further discussed in the Founding Fathers section.

There are two primary aspects or interpretations of the first clause of the First Amendment, due solely to the ambiguity of the word *respecting*. The first interpretation may be more clearly worded thus: *Congress shall make no law affecting an establishment of religion, etc.* That is, no law that Congress creates shall in any way have a hand in influencing a religion. This is to say that the government may not legally prescribe any religion for its people, thereby promoting or admonishing any one faith. As we will see in my discussion of the Supreme Court, the government does, however, have the right to step in when some action has been taken that blurs or destroys the line between Church and State. The purpose of this amendment is to establish, clearly and firmly, a distinction between government and religion. As long as any individual or collection of people (a church, for example) practice their faith in a way that does not violate this Establishment Clause or any other law, then the government has no right to interfere with said practice.

The second interpretation can be better understood as follows: *Congress shall make no law influenced by any establishment of religion, etc.* That is, Congress shall not be influenced in their law making processes by religion in any way: by pressure from religious groups or funders, their own personal religious beliefs, etc. Article VI further substantiates this claim. If no religious test may be applied to anyone in their pursuit of public office, then it cannot be more plainly shown that religion is not to overtly play a role in the selection of our leaders¹. Let us assume for a moment that this were not included in the Constitution, and the US became legally Christian. If our lawmakers were

¹ I include “overtly” here because, in historical and modern political reality, religion does play a role in elections. Politicians invoke God all the time, and their religious affiliations are often points of contention in their respective races: e.g. the concern of electing JFK, given his Catholicism. The point here, however, is to argue what is *stated* in the Constitution and to thereby establish a normative claim.

uninhibited from making laws that were explicitly Christian (that is, laws that took their lead from and purported the teachings of the Bible), then men may be legally forbidden from shaving². While this is only an example, and an admittedly hyperbolic one at that, I believe it is nonetheless effective. Without the First Amendment, there is no wall that would protect us from unreasonable religious laws—laws that may only be believed necessary by people of *that specific faith*, mind you. That is, the First Amendment does not only protect religious freedom, but it also protects non-Christians (in this hypothetical) from laws of a religion that is not their own.

As I have already stated in regard to the first interpretation, no laws may prohibit, encourage or affect in any other way any religion. Take a recent example: After the attack of September 11th, proposals for a mosque near “Ground Zero” were brought forth. Regardless of any arguments concerning the appropriateness of constructing that particular type of building, given the (albeit extreme form of) religious affiliation of the attackers, no constitutionally legal action could be taken against it. The First Amendment could not hinder such a construction project, as it recognizes the legitimacy of Muslims’ right to erect a mosque wherever they wish—within reason and where building codes allow—free from legal prosecution or any sort of government interference.

The second interpretation states that no laws shall be made that have been influenced by any religion. Due to the immeasurable effect of personal religion on a given individual’s moral/social/etc. beliefs—I am speaking here of our leaders, in particular—this interpretation is admittedly much less tangibly measured and applied. That is, the Establishment Clause cannot hope to protect against a Christian Senator’s

² Leviticus 19:27 – *Neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard.*

adamant defense of “traditional marriage,” even if he cites the Bible as the primary source of his strong belief—in fact, Article VI and the rest of the First Amendment protect his right to do so. As I have already noted and will later discuss further, the Founding Fathers had great respect for religion itself. They saw value in the morals that religion may teach, the purpose it gives men, and the hope it delivers for something greater than just this life. Many of them were religious themselves in varying ways and degrees, and so it seems of extreme importance that they went to such great pains to make the Constitution so religion-neutral. If they valued religion so much, then why not implement it into their lives’ most important work, one that would determine the direction of their new nation and its people’s lives? It logically follows that they had a very strong reason for not doing so.

There are scholars who attempt to defend that we are in fact a Christian nation, based upon the claim that “the Christian religion is inherently assumed and implicitly present in the Constitution” (Miller, Dave). In his article, “Christianity is in the Constitution,” Dr. Dave Miller cites three textual proofs in the Constitution to support his claim. First, Miller references the Establishment Clause itself, stating that the Founding Fathers did not, in fact, mean *every* religion of the world when they said say “religion” in the First Amendment. Rather, they were referring to the multitude of Christian sects. Miller references a proposition for the wording of the First Amendment by George Mason, which reads:

[A]ll men have an equal, natural and unalienable right to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience; and that no particular sect or

society of Christians ought to be favored or established by law in preference to others. (George Mason, via Miller, Dave)

However, the weakness of this argument seems so obvious that one cannot help but wonder why he proposes it in the first place. If this is what the Founding Fathers meant by “religion,” and if we assume their primary goal in creating the Constitution was to create as clear a directive as possible for their new nation, then why did they reject Mason’s working of the Establishment Clause? It stands to reason that the Founding Fathers meant to protect *every* religion, and keep every religion out of government by extension.

Miller secondly cites a clause of the Constitution that states “[i]f any Bill shall not be returned by the President within ten Days (Sundays excepted) after it shall have been presented to him, the Same shall be a Law, in like Manner as if he had signed it” (US Constitution, Article I, Clause 7). Miller claims that this is proof that the nation was designed around the Christian faith—were it so for Judaism, it would read, “Saturdays excepted,” for Islam, “Fridays excepted,” etc.

This may also be easily dismissed. As I have already stated in my introduction, the purpose of this project is not to argue that we are a nation that consists of a mostly Christian population—that is simply an undeniable fact. It is my very willingness to concede that we *are* a Christian nation in the populace sense that I turn to now in order to refute Dr. Miller. I firmly believe that this clause of the Constitution is nothing more than a nod to the fact that most of our population was Christian (and still is). Statistically speaking, therefore, our president will likely be a Christian; furthermore, even if he is not, it is inarguably true that most of our politicians are, simply making it difficult to conduct

business on Sundays. Therefore, Christian Sabbath is allowed as a day off for such duties. Furthermore, it is with this same logic that one may address the fact that the president is sworn in on a Bible. It isn't that the Bible must be used—our presidents have always simply been Christian.

Miller's last point may also be refuted by the above logic. He cites the closing paragraph of the Constitution that dates itself with the phrase "the Seventeenth Day of September in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and Eighty seven" (US Constitution, Article VII). That was simply the proper way to cite dates, and of course the Founding Fathers, most of whom were God-fearing men, would use that phrase to write the date. It is in no way a reflection of our nation's stance on religion, especially in light of the clear presence of the Establishment Clause *and* Article VI, which Miller conveniently ignores.

To use all three of these quotes as supposedly undeniable proof of Christianity's presence in the Constitution is, to use Miller's own words against himself, a "monstrous perversion of historical fact." It is a feeble attempt at textual inductions, and each of his three proofs is easily dismissed with more sound explanations that do not violate the Establishment Clause or Article VI.

There is yet another objection to the claim that our nation is itself secular. Strewn across the pages of classic American dogma and history are references to Christianity. Our Pledge of Allegiance contains the words, "One Nation, Under God"; inked across our paper currency are the words, "In God We Trust"; our presidents almost always end their addresses to the nation with, "God bless these United States of America." I think the picture is clear enough: Some of that which we relate most with our country invokes

capital-G-God. While this specific framing does not necessarily endorse any one religion, it does alienate any polytheistic ones, thereby showing some degree of discrimination.

However, all of these examples have one commonality that distinctly separates them from the US Constitution: none of them are a legal document. That is, they hold as much (if not even less) sway over the law of the land as the Queen does in modern day England. The Pledge, our currency, our presidents' farewells, and even our Declaration of Independence have no legal power; therefore, they do not influence the laws of the United States. Rather, they are merely idealistic symbols of how some have chosen to interpret what America stands for.

The Constitution is the foundation of the country from which all legal and social policies grow. Just as certain plants require certain soils, only certain laws may stem from the legal framework established by the Constitution. In no uncertain terms, even in the most implicitly flexible reading of the Constitution, is America a Christian nation. The Constitution is indeed a godless document.

THE SUPREME COURT'S HANDLING OF RELIGION

If the Constitution is the primary document of this project's analysis, then it only makes sense that we should address the decisions of the men and women whose job it is to interpret that document and render legal judgments based thereupon. Of course, I refer here to the United States Supreme Court. Nominated by the President and approved by Congress, the nine judges are the nation's highest authority on the Constitution. For two and a half centuries they have upheld the Constitution as the premier defenders of personal liberties and social and governmental limitations alike. Their rendered verdicts

are the final word on our nation's laws, and they establish precedents for the lower courts of the country every time the final gavel of each case drops.

Cases dealing with religion—and more specifically, with the Separation of Church and State—are naturally not immune to the acute scrutiny of the Supreme Court; furthermore, these cases tend to be especially high profile. Prayer and/or the teaching of Creationism in public schools, the display of religious artifacts or symbols on public property and mandated recital of the Pledge of Allegiance are all issues that have been handled by the U.S. Supreme Court. As The First Amendment Center notes on its website, the consensus of Americans in regard to how they interpret the religious clause of the First Amendment is tenuous at best:

Most people, at some level, recognize the necessity of religious liberty and toleration, but some balk when a religious tenet of a minority religion conflicts with a generally applicable law or with their own religious faith. Many Americans see the need to separate the state from the church to some extent, but decry the banning of school-sponsored prayer from public schools and the removal of the Ten Commandments from public buildings.

This illustrates the putty-like nature that most Americans prescribe to the First Amendment: each of us typically tend to shape and twist it to best fit our own opinion of what relationship the State and Church should have. It is due to this—and do not think I am speaking ill here of American citizens' propensity to subjectively interpret this law, for it is human nature to do what I have described, especially when you consider the heavy value people tend to place on their religious convictions—that the Supreme Court firmly steps in and establishes what is and is not allowed by the Constitution. It is their

job to, as best they can and within their interpretation of the Establishment Clause, proclaim what is legally tolerable regarding religion and public/governmental affairs.

Court cases such as the ones I shall shortly discuss serve as the clearest indicators of the United States' stance on the separation of Church and State, and what the laws will and will not allow. As cases dealing with the First Amendment are constantly arising, it is an ongoing job of the Supreme Court to maintain not only a firm definition of what is said in the Constitution, but also a clear consistency in their verdicts. As a majority of the country still believes in God today and live through the lens of that belief, it is safe to say that the religious landscape of our nation has not drastically changed over the course of our nation's short history. That is to say no more than that the public tend towards belief in God, and to some degree apply that belief in many facets of their life, both private and public. As the private aspect thereof is clearly protected by the First Amendment, it is only the job of the court to monitor that public tendency and be sure that no overstepping occurs that threatens the delicate balance between private faith and any sort of state-endorsement of faith. This enduring pursuit of balance suggests the court's sustained awareness of "how easily partisan religion in the hands of a purported majority can become a dangerous form of intellectual and political tyranny"

(Kramnick and Moore, 11).

We shall first look at what is likely the most well known of all religious cases, *McCullum v. Board of Education*. What follows are the facts of the case:

The Champaign County Board of Education authorized a program of religious instruction in which outside religious teachers, paid for by private third parties, were allowed to enter schools once a week to provide religious instruction. Those

students not wishing to participate in the program were sent to another room to continue with their [secular] class work. Attendance records were kept, and those not attending either the classes or the alternate classroom were considered truant.

(McCollum)

While private third parties provided the funds for the program—obviously legal under the First Amendment—the physical space in which the Creationist classes were taught was *not* privately funded. The public schoolrooms being used were provided solely by taxpayer dollars; therefore, public funding was contributing to the teaching of religious belief, which is not protected or allowed by the First Amendment. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of McCollum 8-1, stating in the majority opinion that “a state cannot consistently with the First and Fourteenth Amendments utilize its public school system to aid any or all religious faiths or sects in the dissemination of their doctrines and ideals” (McCollum, Justice Hugo Black).

Regarding religious education in publicly funded schools, this case drew the Supreme Court’s line in the sand quite vividly. No public funds, or any beneficiaries thereof, can be legally used “to aid any or all religious faiths or sects in the dissemination of their doctrines and ideals.” The dissenting opinion of Justice Stanley Reed stated that “The prohibition of enactments respecting the establishment of religion do not bar every friendly gesture between church and state” (McCollum). Regardless of however benevolent the nature of the Champaign Board of Education’s intent may have been though, eight of the Justices still found the school’s program to be unconstitutional. The propagation of a faith was therefore decided to be impermissible when it is funded in any way by public funds.

The second case we will look at became a landmark case, as it established a three-pronged rule for judgments regarding religious establishment—this would be known as “The Lemon Test” (Lemon, both sources). The facts of *Lemon v. Kurtzman* follow:

Pennsylvania and Rhode Island statutes provided state aid to church-related elementary and secondary schools. A group of individual taxpayers and religious liberty organizations filed suit, challenging the constitutionality of the program. They claimed that, since the program primarily aided parochial schools, it violated the Establishment Clause. (Lemon)

As a reminder, the Establishment Clause “not only forbids the government from establishing an official religion, but also prohibits government actions that unduly favor one religion over another” (Establishment). The three-pronged test was created by the court in order to handle this case (and two others that were heard concurrently, *Earley v. DiCenso* and *Robinson v. DiCenso*), and was thus also established for further religious cases. It states that for a statute to be constitutional, it “must have ‘a secular legislative purpose,’ it must have principal effects which neither advance nor inhibit religion, and it must not foster ‘an excessive government entanglement with religion’” (Lemon, Oyez).

The first prong serves to ensure that any law or public program does not serve a religious purpose. That is, the primary function of the law or program in question must not be religiously motivated or serve religious purposes, since it is funded by taxpayer dollars. The second prong serves to check that no religion is being promoted or inhibited in any way. For example, a social program that benefits seniors, and only seniors, will pass the second prong without question, and would therefore be legal. However, if the same program were to be found to only support *protestant* seniors, and it were publicly

funded, then it would *not* pass prong two. The third prong serves to keep religion and government as distinctly separate as possible. Take a group of petitioners who want a law to protect them from being forced to work on the Sabbath; however, some of them regard the Sabbath to be on Saturday, while others regard it to be on Sunday. Such a law would require the government to decide which day to designate as the Sabbath, and would overly entangle government with religion: therefore, the third prong of the Lemon Test disallows such a law (Freedom).

In *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, the court found no violation in the first prong; that is, there was no evidence of any religious purpose in the Pennsylvania legislature's passage of the statutes. The second prong was bypassed when the court identified a clear violation of the third prong (thus nullifying the need to analyze the second), in that the statutes resulted in a clear and substantial entanglement between Church and State. This was realized and explained in that the "state's oversight and auditing requirements and the propensity for political divisiveness generated by this kind of aid program would entangle the state and the religious entity in unconstitutional ways" (Lemon, First). As the program provided considerable financial aid to religious schools, it was found to excessively entangle the government and religion. Such a homogenization, which blurs the supposed-to-be distinct boundary between Church and State, was the death of the legislature's statute. By ruling thus, the Supreme Court further illustrated the Constitution's unwillingness to tolerate the funding of any religious education by taxpayer dollars.

Having looked at these two vital court cases in our nation's recent history, it is clear to see where the Supreme Court stands in regard to Church-State relations. Neither case aims to subvert religion; rather, each of them are certain claims that the State will

not fund religious education, for to do so is clearly disallowed by the Constitution. Religious practice is a basic right upon which this country was founded. It simply does not follow from that, however, that the government will pay for it. Likewise, the government does not expect to be paid in return—hence, although it is a practice of much debate, churches are tax-exempt entities. The logic here is that to force a church to pay taxes—which are essentially payments to the government *in return for government support*—would be to curb religious freedom: another clear violation of the Establishment Clause (Lynn). This considered, it appears that the court’s rulings in the above cases are not so hostile toward religion as many would claim. If the Church does not provide for the State, then the State should not be expected to provide for the Church: a sort of *quid pro quo*, in which both parties’ agreement to give nothing achieves the necessary zero-sum.

AMERICA’S FOUNDING FATHERS AND RELIGION

As discussed in this project’s introduction, faith was indeed near and dear to the heart of our nation’s founders and many of its citizens alike. After the winning of the Revolutionary War, the daunting prospect of establishing a nation that could endure faced the leaders of the day. With this task came the question of where the country would stand on faith. As we have already seen, a hard line was drawn between Church and State, and we will now look at some of the men who made certain that it was so.

While men of such intellectual power and ambitious pursuits cannot be expected to ignore religion wholly in their personal lives, we will see that this is not what primarily concerned our Founding Fathers. Their chief concern in this area was not with religion itself; rather, it lay in the surety of absolute religious freedom in the United States and for

her citizens. This attitude was unprecedented in the so-called “civilized world”. Despite the momentum with which the founders moved forward with this separatist notion, it was far from an easy sell:

On the contrary, what was self-evident to the vast majority of the colonists and their leaders (religious or political) was that society survived only as a church and state worked and worshiped together, only as values were shared, only as common assumptions about human nature and the nature of God and the universe underlay all action—or at least rationalization. (Gaustad 12-13)

The simple fact of the matter is, a government not backed by (or existing symbiotically with) a church was an unproven method, and a very unstable one in the minds of many.

That said, today we have the benefit of seeing how well the model has functioned. Though far from perfect, it has served our country as well as it could in the face of constant scrutiny and opposition (as evidenced by the court cases in the previous section, along with many others). The Founding Fathers were not foolish men: they saw great value in their decision to keep religion away from the ballot box. What follows are accounts of five of their views on religion in politics, and what led them to their separatist view of Church and State. I have chosen these five (named just below) not for the greatly important roles they played in America’s founding—I would have to discuss each of the Founding Fathers, were that the case—but for their clearly laid arguments regarding our nation’s secular approach to government.

As noted by Edwin Gaustad in *Faith of Our Fathers*, we may safely divide these five men into three categories (though Jefferson falls under two of these headers):

philosophes³, libertarians and icons. To be initially brief, the philosophes were John Adams and Thomas Jefferson; the libertarians, John Madison and Jefferson again; the icons, Benjamin Franklin and George Washington. These three categories each carefully define not only the way these men viewed God and religion in their own personal lives, but also how they believed it should be dealt with in regard to government. As we have already noted, their primary concern in the religious field was that it remain distinctly separate from the political processes of the nation. The three categories simply denote how distinct that separation should be, the value of religion to society as held by the men and how they viewed God in their lives.

We shall start with the philosophes, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. The philosophes relentlessly attacked not faith itself, but biblical revelation: they viewed it as a shackle that “brought not peace to the world, but a sword...[that] did not create knowledge, but blocked every path to learning and every free investigation” (Gaustad 87). Heavily partial to the philosophy of the Enlightenment, these men were not traditional philosophers in any sense other than their affection and respect for reason, which they interpreted as containing a necessary “rejection of Revelation” (Gaustad 87). They saw value in self-improvement for the sake of self-improvement, and in tangible and practical solutions for worldly issues. Both Adams and Jefferson dismissed some highly regarded classical philosophy as worthless musings, such as the “abstractions of Plato” (Gaustad 86). They saw this as a sort of mental trap that only sought metaphysical “truths” that

³ A brief aside for clarity, this is not a typo. The term *philosophe* is used here to describe these men, who “were not technically philosophers...[and] regarded nothing as too sacred to be touched or investigated, nothing as too ancient and respected to be challenged or even overthrown” (Gaustad 85). If this still doesn’t seem distinct enough, consider the following: “They most likely disdained the professional philosophers lost in their own rarefied systems and metaphysical abstractions” (Ibid.).

were, for the purposes of men of action trying to set a nation on its feet and push it in the right direction, of no consequence and a squandering of painful mental effort that could be applied to a more useful purpose. As opposed to pondering deep questions of what it *really* means to have Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness, they sought ways to ensure its perpetuance and defense.

They therefore tended towards the more practical philosophies of ethics and politics. Adams, for one, recognized great ethical and sociopolitical value in both intellectual and religious freedom of the most absolute sense. Choosing to pursue a career in law rather than the divine fields, he noted: “I shall have liberty to think for myself without molesting others or being molested myself” (Gaustad 88). For his country, Adams yearned for a strong principle of liberty to hold one’s own counsel in peace, free from any aggressive and unwanted interference from others, especially the government. In the mind of the philosophes, a free mind is the best mind—and a free mind of opposing views, at liberty to peacefully debate those views with you, is a welcome one indeed.

This is not to say Adams harbored any ill will towards religion. He thought of Christianity in particular as a great moral conduit, suited for an ideologically good purpose: to bring to the masses “the great Principle of the Law of Nature and Nations, Love your Neighbor as yourself, and do to others as you would that others should do to you” (Gaustad 89). These strong ethical tenets—though Adams would argue they are achievable without religion—are undoubtedly good byproducts of the Bible, and ones that a nation needs to succeed.

Jefferson was much of the same mind. He saw value in religion, claiming a nation with corrupted Christianity would be better than one totally devoid of God-fearing citizens (Gaustad 105). Like Adams, Jefferson especially valued the moral lessons to be found in the Bible, going so far as to create the Jeffersonian Bible, which contained the moral teachings of Christ (whom he thought to be one of the greatest moral philosophers of all time) but was absent all instances of the supernatural (Gaustad 101).

Jefferson thought the nation would be full of Unitarians over time: a religion that emphasized the one true God, to whom all creatures owe their existence. That is not to say, however, that the Unitarian God was a god who lusted for praise. Jefferson firmly believed “that we are saved by our good works which are within our power, and not by our faith which is not within our power” (Gaustad 105). This further emphasized his (and Adams’) praise of Reason, to which all men should turn in order to find what constitutes Jefferson’s “good works.” Self-reliance, therefore, is not a burden but a necessary cause for achieving “public virtue” and our sole means of salvation (Gaustad). The philosophes believed in a government that did not interfere in religion, because they believed in a society that did not necessarily need it. That said, they saw value in religion’s moral teachings—if the ethical lessons were accompanied by a supernatural anecdote, then it was an acceptable price to pay.

The libertarians were even more separatist than the philosophes. Jefferson, falling into both categories, had a slightly less harsh view of religion than did Adams; however, he was of the strongest adamancy that the church be a completely separate entity from the government. Parallel with our modern interpretation of libertarianism, the motto is

simple: Leave it alone. The government has no role to play at the pulpit, and vice versa.

As James Madison viewed it:

Religion...is never properly a matter for armies to decide or legislatures to promote. Only reason and conviction are relevant to decisions on who worships when or where or how—or if at all. Since this is true, neither generals nor politicians have the right or authority, much less the wisdom, to “judge of Religious Truth.” (Gaustad 39-40)

This, more than any quote I have utilized thus far, illustrates with the utmost clarity a normative claim regarding the government’s role in the church, also paying reverence to individual “reason and conviction.”

Upon receiving a draft of the Constitution, James Madison immediately wrote back demanding what would become the First Amendment, saying he did not like “the omission of a bill of rights providing clearly and without the aid of sophisms for the freedom of religion” (Gaustad 44). In a way, he could be considered the instigator of the First Amendment, or more specifically the Establishment Clause, which would be dubbed “The First Liberty,” its physical location in the amendments implying its great importance in the hearts and minds of the Founding Fathers (Gaustad 44). Such an immediate reaction to the Constitution’s oversight of this issue does indeed portray Madison as a staunch supporter of religious independence from the government.

To further support this claim regarding Madison, we need only look at some of his actions as president. In his tenure in office, he vigorously defended the amendment he asked of Jefferson. In 1811 he vetoed two bills on the grounds that they blurred “the essential distinction between civil and religious function,” thereby establishing

“precedent for the appropriation of funds of the United States for the use and support of religious societies” (Gaustad 51). Perhaps to avoid confusion, we should note here: the precedent Madison wished to create was one that *very clearly disallowed any use of government funds for the support of religion*. In the previous section, we saw this very precedent enforced by Supreme Courts of the 20th century.

Some argue Madison might have gone too far when he decried the employment of chaplains in the army. However, this is simply Madison at his utmost libertarian (Gaustad 56). The army, as a publically funded subsidy of the nation, for the nation, had no room in his view for religious interference. To allow such a thing would be to create a slippery slope that allowed for greater and greater convergence of religion and government: a danger which “cannot be too carefully guarded ag[ain]st” (Gaustad 56).

Perhaps the clearest example of Madison’s insistence upon a legally secular state lies in Article XI of the Treaty of Tripoli. The opening line thereof reads as follows: “As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion...” (United). Despite what many would believe to be a contentious claim, the treaty was ratified in the Senate unanimously. That said, I will concede that the exact facts of Article XI are by no means undisputed. Some scholars claim that specific article of the treaty did not appear in the Arabic version (i.e. the version presented to be signed by the Barbary powers at Tripoli), while others claim it was only included to placate the Muslims, so they would not worry of any religion-fueled retribution by the US (Miller, Hunter). However, the version of the treaty that Madison presented to the Senate for ratification—which was, of course, translated into English—*did* in fact contain Article XI (Miller, Hunter). This, therefore, speaks not only to Madison’s feelings on the

matter of religion's role in the founding of the United States, but to many of our nation's other leaders at the time.

Jefferson, in the libertarian sense, saw eye to eye with Madison. He saw the nations of the world, both past and present, which allowed for a meshing of Church and State to constitute a “loathsome combination...” that for so many centuries reduced human beings to ‘dupes and drudges’” (Gaustad 47). As he saw it, governments will always have enough problems that need solving, both foreign and domestic. With rational thinking alone, he believed all of those problems could be solved: religion only serves to create a population of “dupes and drudges” that exacerbate the issues by pushing their dogma into the decision-making processes of the leaders. By keeping religion legally separate from government, this added problem might be altogether avoided.

Jefferson also took issue with those who feared the new path the young nation would be forging, by forsaking religion in its political guidance. He claimed that those who stoically stood against the forward thinking of the likes of himself and Madison must believe that “the earth belongs to the dead, and not to the living” (Gaustad 49). By this, he simply invokes the truth of the matter facing the Founding Fathers: if they were to move forward into the uncharted territory of a secular State, then they would have to forsake the thoughts of their forefathers and learn from their lessons instead. History had taught Jefferson that theocratically influenced governments could not succeed as he wanted America to succeed; therefore, he must do all in his power to keep the Church's fingers out the business of running the country.

Throughout their entire active careers in the United States' politics and beyond, both Jefferson and Madison “endeavored to give [the Establishment Clause] the soundest,

sternest construction that they could bear” (Gaustad 44). They both saw its importance to the survival of the State as they envisioned it, fought hard to establish it, and fought harder to make sure it was and would always be clearly understood. Separatists until their dying breaths, both men simply propagated what they believed gave their new country the greatest chance at surviving in the world.

Likewise, the two members of the third category of Founding Fathers strove to ensure the creation of a path upon which the United States could flourish for unforeseeable years. The icons, named thusly simply because of their beloved nature in the hearts of the American people (and their legendary status among even foreign peoples), took a more passive but no less influential stance on Church-State relations. Unified by their beloved nature and their less hands-on approach than we have thus far observed in the three other Founding Fathers above, it should still not be said that they did not have beliefs worth consideration about the matter of the Church-State relationship. Benjamin Franklin and George Washington, names and faces recognizable to virtually every American still today, stand even more prominently than the previously discussed men upon the pages of our nation’s history, and should therefore be addressed.

For his part, Franklin claimed to not really concern himself with religion. Claiming beer as proof that God exists and wants us to be happy, one can easily see how seriously he considered a higher power. That said, though, Franklin did not write off religion as irrelevant to society, as only a fool would do. Rather, he claimed faith as “only a means to obtain that End” of morality and virtue, which he considered to be the highest possible calling of man, regardless of the existence of God or salvation (Gaustad 64-65). Through this lens we may see that Franklin, like Adams, viewed religion as a conduit of

greater moral ends, and that the Bible was to him merely a convenient tool for finding those ends.

He did indeed appreciate the nuggets of wisdom contained in the Bible, as he utilized many of them for his renowned *Poor Richard's Almanac*. Though not necessarily a subscriber to the dogma of the Bible, Franklin “was willing to borrow wise sayings from wherever he might find them” (Gaustad 60). Furthermore, he recognized the worth of the convenience of Christianity’s well-organized and easily digestible lessons of morality:

Think how great a proportion of Mankind...consists of weak and ignorant Men and Women, and of inexperience'd Youth of both Sexes, who have need of the Motives of Religion to restrain them from Vice, to support their Virtue, and retain them in the Practice of it till it becomes habitual, which is the great Point of its Security. (Gaustad 61)

Though he did not necessarily stake any faith, like many of the other Founding Fathers, in revelations or a hope of salvation, he inarguably saw the necessity of faith for the masses of uneducated and generally unlearned peoples.

George Washington was nearly as indifferent to religion as Franklin, and all the more beloved regardless—Washington himself was a god to his people. As Adams declared in his eulogy of the first president, “For his fellow citizens, if their prayers could have been answered, he would have been immortal” (Gaustad 75). Jefferson’s praise for Washington was just as high, as he claimed, “His integrity was most pure, his justice the most inflexible I have ever known” (Gaustad 75). It may then be induced, perhaps, that

the nation was as indifferent to Washington's religion as he himself was to religion itself: he seemed to embody the Son of God many of them worshipped every Sunday.

Washington was well known for his non-denominational euphemisms for God. Grand Architect, Governor of the Universe, Higher Cause, Great Ruler of Events, All Wise Creator, the Supreme Dispenser of all Good—each of these, used in his writing and in his speeches, connote the “vaguely impersonal, broadly benign, calmly rational flavor” of God in the eyes of this man (Gaustad 76-77). Playing his first major role in American history as General of the Colonial forces, and assuming the old adage that “there are no atheists in foxholes” holds, then we may safely assume that these varied allusions are not his non-committal method of avoiding an establishment of belief in God. Rather, they seem to reflect his willingness to cast the details of his personal beliefs aside when addressing the nation in deference to what he believed to be best for the nation.

Though a rarely discussed subject by the president, what words he did have about the separation of Church and State were just as efficient as his military leadership. When faced with the concern of Presbyterian elders that the Constitution was devoid of any mention of God or Christ, Washington's reply was beautifully crafted: “The path of true piety is so plain as to require but little political direction” (Gaustad 78). A man not known for being an exquisite wordsmith or orator, I believe Washington sums up in fifteen words what many fill books trying to explain: A nation need not disturb itself with religious matters, nor should a religion beg of its nation “political direction.” Though admittedly not as aggressive or direct as the other four men I have discussed, Washington's stance seems clear enough: an interweaving of religion and government is simply unnecessary.

Each of these five men, whether of the philosophe, libertarian or iconic brand, made strong arguments for establishing and maintaining an officially secular state. Their credentials as leaders, political thinkers and social organizers were excellent. Their premises were simple and in some cases historically founded, and their conclusions were almost wholly similar: The way to the healthiest possible State is the way that requires government to coexist entirely independently of any system of religious belief. Freedom of Religion is a natural right; however, that is for private life. All of them concede in some degree that religion, specifically Christianity, serves the populace as a powerful moral guide. In the same breath, however, they each assert that that serves as no argument for religion having a seat in Congress. These Founding Fathers, along with the others, substantiated this claim with the penning of the Establishment Clause: “The First Liberty” indeed, securing both religious freedom and freedom from religious oppression.

JESUS CAMP: A MODERN APPLICATION

Now that I have analyzed my three primary historical points of study, how does all of this translate into modern society? In many cases besides this one, it is simply the case that reality does not always follow the logic. For many Americans who hold religion dearly in their hearts, they refuse to even admit the possibility that we are not a Christian nation in every sense of the phrase. Pathos and ethos, effectively applied, will more often than not charge logos down into obscurity. It is with such rhetoric that the primary adult subject of the film *Jesus Camp* has built her small army of evangelical children, whom she instructs to “take [the] prophecies [of the Bible], and do what the Apostle Paul said, and make war with them” (*Jesus Camp*).

Becky Fischer was the founder and head of the since-closed evangelical children's camp, Kids on Fire. Founded in 2001, the camp hosted children, mostly ages seven to nine, in order to instruct them to be radical in their faith. Fischer focuses her ministry on children because she claims to have witnessed them “just moments [after being saved]...seeing visions and hearing the voice of God because they are so open. They are so usable in Christianity” (*Jesus Camp*). She believes that evangelicals have to focus on the children because “the enemy” — Muslims — focus on their children, and are in fact “teaching them how to use machine guns...rifles...[and are] putting hand grenades on their belts” at an early age (*Jesus Camp*). Fischer does not beat around the bush when discussing her goals for her kids: She plainly states she “want[s] to see [children] radically laying down their lives for the Gospel as they are in Pakistan, in Israel, in Palestine” (*Jesus Camp*).

This is reflected visually when we see children performing a warlike dance dressed in camouflage with paint on their faces to a song that is heavy with war drums and chants. Multiple times throughout the film, we see scenes of children bawling, trembling on their knees with their hands raised and screaming in tongues. At one point, one girl happily recants a tale of people chanting “martyr” as her father departed for a mission trip (*Jesus Camp*). For their breakfast prayer, a man forgoes asking for the food as nourishment to their bodies in favor of reminding God that we need an end to abortion, which is a theme of many of their prayers and of a later stance of solidarity they take in front of the United States Capitol (*Jesus Camp*). The kids are constantly awash with religious propaganda, suffocated by it so that they do not have a spare second to consider the degree to which they are being asked to devote their lives to Christ.

It is not this alone, however, that merits this discussion in this project. Coinciding with the filming of this, US Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor was being replaced. Throughout the film, you hear sound bites from different radio programs, and follow one broadcaster, Mike Papantonio, in particular. Some of them are of the Christian America persuasion: "We are engaged today in what they call 'culture war'. We didn't start it, but we by His grace are going to end it. And we should say, 'yes, we want to claim America for Christ" (*Jesus Camp*). These same people later say that Justice Alito, who was selected to take O'Connor's place, is a Godsend, a man who will back Christian values, a man who will "bring America back to One Nation Under God" (*Jesus Camp*). These people want to circulate their religion's values in every pore of the nation and fill every seat in Washington with people who believe exactly as they do.

Mike Papantonio serves as the voice of reason throughout the film. He is a Christian man who recognizes the "Separation of Church and State sets us apart [from other nations]. It's worked for 200 years" (*Jesus Camp*). He finds it appalling that children are brainwashed by people like Fischer, and most importantly denounces any "entanglement with politics and religion" (*Jesus Camp*). There is a doubtless entanglement—Papantonio's words are not without merit. For instance, mega church televangelist Ted Haggard said in one of his services that "[Evangelicals] have enough sway to determine the election. If the evangelicals vote, they determine the election"; furthermore, this same man met with President George W. Bush and his advisors every Monday during his two terms (*Jesus Camp*). One sect of one religion determining national elections does not seem at all what the Founding Fathers intended when they penned the First Amendment and Article VI of the Constitution.

While religion in private life is certainly no problem, it becomes one when it begins to strongly affect the education of children. Eli and his brother, two primary child subjects in the film, are shown during a home school lesson taught by their mother. During the lesson, she tells her sons that “if you look at Creationism, you realize it’s the only possible answer to all the questions”; however, she doesn’t stop there—she directs Eli to a part of his textbook that claims global warming as a hoax, and later asks Eli, “Did you get to the part on here where it says ‘science doesn’t really prove anything?’ And it’s really interesting when you look at it that way” (*Jesus Camp*). In the same breath, she claims that religion—which is based solely upon faith and cannot be *known*—has all the answers to every question, while science—a field of study based upon creating and testing theories based upon empirical evidence, a process that is then repeated again and again—proves nothing. Science takes a hit again when one of the preachers at Kids on Fire, during an attack on abortion, tells the children that they “are not just a piece of protoplasm... whatever that is” (*Jesus Camp*). In talking about science like it is some joke to be laughed away, he tries to attack science’s ethos and bolster his own. It is ethically appalling what is done to these children, whom Fischer admits she wants indoctrinated (*Jesus Camp*).

The film quotes a statistic that states seventy-five percent of all homeschooled children are evangelical Christians, who seem to be taught that science is disingenuous, global warming is false, the world is 6,000 years old, the Bible has all the answers we need, that “there are two kinds of people in the world: people who believe in Jesus, and people who don’t,” etc. (*Jesus Camp*). As Mike Papantonio says, these are the people who are not concerned for the long-term well being of our world, for they envision a near

future where the sky opens up, Jesus comes down and reclaims His people. They do not believe that we will be here long enough to merit any serious environmental policy. If what Ted Haggard claimed is true, and we are a nation that could be ruled by the mercy of the evangelical vote, then that is worrisome indeed.

Toward the end of the film, a sound bite is played in which a man says, “The most religious nation in the world is India. The most irreligious nation in the world is Sweden. We are a nation of Indians ruled by Swedes” (Jesus Camp). While he says that with disdain, I would argue that this is exactly what the Founding Fathers intended. While it is not necessarily true that we are meant to be ruled by irreligious men and women, it *is* true that religion was not intended to impact their leadership and their policymaking. Just as John Adams chose to study law in favor of divinity in order to “have liberty to think for [him]self without molesting others or being molested,” our nation’s political and legal systems should never face molestation by religious zealots who laugh in the face of science and readily admit to creating an army of children to lay down their lives for the Christian God (Gaustad 88). It is in itself ethically appalling, and certainly has no place in America’s politics.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this project I have analyzed three distinct aspects of the United States’ foundation in order to firmly establish the claim that the nation was, in fact, not established as a Christian nation. In looking at the Constitution I gleaned only one primary order for the US respecting religion: that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of Religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” We see here a clear legal directive, one that establishes only secular reasons as grounds for making laws.

Furthermore, the government is likewise forbidden to make laws that impede upon citizens' right to practice whichever religion they wish.

Article VI forbids religious tests of any kind as prerequisites for holding public office in the US, further pushing religion out of the State (US Constitution). To be clear, that is not to say that religious people of any level of any faith be forbidden from office—it says the exact opposite. A person's religion should (ideally) play *no role* in their election, especially in hindering it. We see no other mentions of religion in the document, and certainly none promoting its role in government functions.

In *McCullum v. Board of Education* and *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, we saw two landmark cases whereby the Supreme Court firmly disallowed public funds and government support of religious programs. In the former case, the Supreme Court saw Champaign County's allocation of public resources for the teaching of Christian faith to be plainly out of line with what is allowed by the Constitution. Years later, in *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, the court established the "Lemon Test." A three-pronged rule for future cases of such a nature, this legal rule of thumb would help any court more easily decide whether a given program violated the Constitution's First Amendment, with specific regard to allocation of public funds. If we accept, as we should, that the Supreme Court is the final arbiter of our nation's laws, then the relevance of such legal decisions should be clear enough.

Lastly, we looked at five of the Founding Fathers, analyzing their stance on religion in politics. Though each of them made clear concessions that religion is a powerful instigator of public morality, they made even clearer that religion should have no role in government. Their experience under the rule of the British Crown, and by

connection the Church of England, along with their abundance of historical and sociopolitical knowledge made it clear to them that a secular State was to the greatest advantage for a nation. The dangers imposed by Christian influence on the government were monumentally clear to them, the primary threat being potential (if not certain) oppression of religious minorities.

In their considerable wisdom, they recognized the right to practice any religion as a natural right of all mankind—this is clear in the second half of the Establishment Clause. However, despite this and despite the good that they saw in religion, they strongly believed it best to forever remove religion from America's legal system. Though not all were in favor of this, as they believed a State without a religious backing could not succeed, the majority of our founders saw it a bold move toward a progressive nation that would be a new light for the world, an example for all other nations to follow.

Though Christianity is deeply rooted in American history, it seems we may safely claim that the Constitution in no way upholds the Christian religion—or any, for that matter—as the religion of the United States of America. Through the scopes of the Constitution itself, our Supreme Court's historical decisions and the religious intentions of our Founding Fathers for our nation a strong claim may be made that our government was and is intended to be a secular one. After the United States' foundation, the nation's subsequent growth, success and international leadership may be taken as evidence of the success of the model of government our Founding Fathers chose for us.

I do not ignorantly assume that religion plays no role in American politics. Rather, in turning to the three points of study that I have viewed in this project, I have shown that religion was not intended to, nor should it. As Thomas Jefferson said in a letter to the

Clergy of Danbury Baptists Church, "Religion is a matter which lies solely between Man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions" (Jefferson). The State is intended as a governor and protector of the affairs of men: of their moral responsibility to let one another live freely, of their free and fair trade and of their natural rights. The State is not intended to meddle in the affairs of Man's relationship with God, but to vigilantly and perpetually protect it and also maintain the separation of religion and government. The Constitution is a godless document not for a godless nation, but for a government that rules by reason and leaves religion to its people. This model has effectively sustained and promoted the thriving of American society for two and a half centuries, and it will continue to do so.

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