

Is America A Christian Nation?

(The History)

This lesson is influenced by the following resources:

- John Fea. Was America Founded As A Christian Nation. (Fea is Professor of American History and Chair of the History Department at MESSIAH COLLEGE in Penn.)
- Gregg L. Frazer. The Religious Beliefs of America’s Founders. (Frazier is Professor of History and Political Studies at THE MASTER’S COLLEGE).
- Walter Isaacson. Benjamin Franklin: An American Life
- Mark David Hall. Did America Have a Christian Founding (The Heritage Foundation Article)
- Harris and Kidd. The Founding Fathers and the Debate Over Religion in Revolutionary America.
- David McCullough. John Adams

“When this debate heats up the two intense and common mistakes are when we respond with either ‘ _____ or ‘ _____.’” Mark David Hall

My response to the question is “It’s _____!”

The first problem we have in answering this question is how you define the label “ _____ ” as it relates to a nation.

1. Do you mean does America hold to a set of _____ truths?
2. Do you mean that America is a “Christian Nation” by her _____?
3. Do you mean by “Christian Nation” that the _____ of the people is like Jesus?

What do you mean by “nation” and “founded?”

- Do you mean when the _____
- Do you mean in _____
- Or was it 1789 when the United States _____ becomes the official frame of American government?
- Was it during the _____
- Or did we become a “Christian Nation” at some _____

The next issue that makes this question so complicated is _____.

The Treaty of Tripoli, a 1797 agreement between the U.S. and Tripoli in Africa began with these words:

“As the Government of the United States of America is _____ in _____ sense, founded on the Christian religion....”

The problem with that statement in the treaty is that’s _____ the way politicians, clergy, educators and others perceived the United States in the first 100 years.

What about our founding documents?

THE CONSTITUTION

Well, the Constitution does not _____ the Bible and makes _____ mention of God.

The Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence _____ reference God as “_____ **God**”

It also mentions self-evident truths being “**endowed by their _____.**”

Then at the end of the Declaration of Independence we have one more reference to God as “**Supreme _____ of the World.**”

There is also this phrase “**divine _____.**”

The Federalist Papers

Very _____ references to God—just things like “providence” mentioned _____ times.

However, if America was founded as a Christian Nation—the lack of mention of _____ or _____ is striking!

It was the _____-**FEDERALISTS** who wanted to insert God into the Constitution—not the framers of the Constitution.

With then let’s turn to what the **FOUNDING FATHERS thought of Christianity.**

George Washington:

There's the famous story and painting of George Washington on his knees praying at Valley Forge.

The problem is it most likely _____ happen!

Here's what we do know:

- Washington was _____ about his faith
- He did not leave behind _____ about what he believed
- He wasn't particularly _____ about theology like Franklin and Jefferson were
- He did stress the role of "Providence" (more than ____ times)
- He wasn't exactly a _____ because Washington's God was active, performed miracles, answered prayer and intervened in history
- He was christened into the _____ Church at birth
- He _____ two churches
- Between 1762 and 1794 he was vestryman and church _____.
- But there is very very little to suggest that Washington believed in the Judeo-_____ God of history.
- WASHINGTON ALMOST _____ USED THE NAME JESUS CHRIST
- He never affirms orthodox doctrines such as: The _____ of Christ, his _____ for the sins of the world, his _____.
- But he was _____ literate. He quoted from it more than any other book.
- He _____, attended church (sometimes)
- **And FAITH PLAYED _____ ROLE in his _____:**

John Adams:

- He was _____ in a Christian home.
- He worshipped in a _____ church
- He even considered pursuing a career as a _____.
- He ultimately _____ the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity
- He has many appearances of being a Christian—BUT his personal _____ about Jesus fell short.

He defined his religion in this quote:

“Benevolence and Beneficence, Industry, Equity and Humanity, Resignation and Submission, Repentance and Reformation ARE THE _____ OF MY RELIGION.”

Adams wrote: ***“An incarnate God!!! An eternal, self-existent omnipresent omniscient Author of this stupendous Universe suffering on a Cross!!! My Soul starts with _____ at the Idea.”***

He called it “a convenient cover for _____.”

Thomas Jefferson:

- Traditional _____ upbringing
- _____ in the Anglican church
- Lifelong _____ with religion
- He claimed to be a follower of the _____ of Jesus of Nazareth.
- The Jefferson _____ where he cut and pasted all the ethical teachings of Jesus together—leaving out all the supernatural, the _____, and the _____
- He rejected all doctrines that could not be explained by _____
- He thought it rational to believe in God who created the world, so he was not an _____.
- And he wasn’t really a _____—Jefferson’s God was active in sustaining the world and governing the affairs of humankind.

- He would be what Gregg Frazer would call a Theistic _____

Benjamin Franklin:

Six weeks before the end of his life Franklin wrote out his theology:

“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 Principles of all sound Religion, and I regard them as you, in whatever Sect I meet with them.

As for Jesus of Nazareth, my Opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think the system of Morals and his Religion as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw, or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes, and I have, with most the present dissenters in England, some doubts to his divinity; tho’ it is a question I do not dogmatise upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it now, where I expect soon an Opportunity of knowing the Truth with less trouble.”

Three Orthodox Founding Fathers:

John Witherspoon

John Jay: Christian Providentialist

Samuel Adams: Puritan Republican

Conclusions:

1. **The founders of our nation were neither _____** (as we understand the term today) **nor _____**. They were theistic rationalists.
2. **They were a _____ of their _____**.
3. **They desired for religion to be used to help establish and maintain _____ and civility.**

4. They believed in Christian _____ but not essential Christian _____.

5. They don't fit our _____ or categories today:

6. IT'S _____!!!

Discussion:

- 1. Take-a-Ways from Tonight?**
- 2. How does this change how you see our country of its founding Fathers?**
- 3. Questions, Comments, Concerns?**