

America's "Forsaken Roots": The Use and Abuse of Founders' Quotations

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Christian Right, frustrated by its inability to change American culture through political means over the last three decades, continues to engage in multiple strategies to recapture the supposedly vanishing "Christian roots" of the nation. Among these strategies are the dissemination of faxes, emails, pamphlets, brochures, books, and flyers that "prove" that the Founding Fathers were not only Christian men in their personal lives, but also leaders who intended that the nation be formally Christian. Among the darlings of the Christian Right is David Barton, who in his widely circulated book, *The Myth of Separation*, argues that the Founding Fathers intended "that this nation should be a Christian nation; not because all who lived in it were Christians, but because it was founded on and would be governed by Christian principles." Barton is also known for being a prolific compiler of quotes from the Founding Fathers, which are widely disseminated in various forms and intended to show how far America today has departed from the Christian nation the Founders supposedly established.

We recently received an email encouraging us to access a particular website that contains many of the most widely used quotations supposedly attributable to the Founders. Many of these quotations appear in many of Barton's works, but they appear in many venues elsewhere as more or less "proof texts" for the evils of the separation of church and state and the need for America to revert to its Christian origins. The website, <http://www.wtvzone.com/Mary/forsakenroots-.html>, titled "America's Forsaken Roots," is set to music and takes the listener through about five minutes of quotations which are nicely supplemented by pictures and graphics. At the end, the site suggests that "If you would like to share this page with a friend or relative just fill in the blanks below and then hit 'send email,'" thus enabling others to share in the emotion-laden message of America's "Forsaken Roots." The compiler/editor is anonymous, but the page is said to belong to "Mary Jones."

The site is rife with inaccuracies. While it is tempting, after viewing the website, for those with a deeper sense of the nuances of the philosophical/theological underpinnings of the American polity to merely chuckle and move on to other pursuits, it is important that someone at least attempt to post a few warning signs that alert the general public to the inaccuracies contained in the presentation. Otherwise, unsubstantiated half-truths and distortions continue to be disseminated unabated among the masses, and truth suffers. It has come to our attention, moreover, that the website is a popular one, and thus we are compelled to provide some kind of counter to its assertions. Accordingly, while this essay is in no way an attempt to address all that could be said about the problems posed by the website, it is an effort to summarize the principal inaccuracies evidenced in the presentation. We shall provide the text of the presentation in sixteen segments, with our own commentary following each segment. Our commentary, in order to make the information accessible to a general audience, makes reference to a number of reliable websites that contain information useful in countering some of the assertions of the "Forsaken Roots" presentation.

II. COMMENTARY

1. Signers

"Did you know that 52 of the 55 signers of the Declaration of Independence were orthodox, deeply committed Christians? The other three all believed in the Bible as the divine truth, the

God of Scripture, and His personal intervention.”

A reliable website lists all the signers (56, not 55) of the Declaration of Independence with their date of birth and death, the colony they represented, their place of birth, their known church or religious affiliation, and the sources from which the information was compiled. See: <http://www.usconstitution.net/declarsigndata.html#rkey>.

This helpful website identifies the church membership, and if there was none of record, the particular religious inclination, such as Deist, of each signer. The website indicates that 77 percent of the signatories were either religious or a member of a Christian church, and that for the remaining 23 percent there are no records indicating religious perspective or church membership. Church membership was very low (less than 30 percent) among the citizens of the various colonies during the period between the First and Second Great Awakenings. The comparatively high percentage of church members among the signatories was typical of political leaders in all the colonies due to historical/political precedents and customs for qualification for office. However, church membership is not a good measure of the actual religious perspective of each of the signatories since Deistic rationalism was not necessarily grounds for losing church membership. In the founding era, church membership was not a good indicator of whether a person was an orthodox Christian. For example, George Washington, though he did not sign the Declaration, was a member of the Episcopal Church in Virginia, but he was known by his closest friends and his minister as a person who was not a communicant (received Lord's Supper) and more a Deist in his personal religious views. Deists perused the Bible more as a source of morals while discounting, its miracles, inspiration, and teachings concerning salvation. Nevertheless, even with these qualifiers in mind, the great majority of the signatories of the Declaration were Christian in perspective but to claim that all or most were orthodox reflects more an unfounded assumption of the compiler/editor than a fact of historical record.

2. The Continental Congress and the American Bible

“It is the same Congress that formed the American Bible Society. Immediately after creating the Declaration of Independence, the Continental Congress voted to purchase and import 20,000 copies of Scripture for the people of this nation.”

This quote is wrong in all particulars. The Continental Congress did not found the American Bible Society. The Society was not founded until 1816, twenty-seven years after the Continental Congress ceased to exist.

The Continental Congress did in fact vote on the purchase and importation of 20,000 Bibles, but the vote did not result in any action being taken on the proposal, thus no Bibles were actually imported by the Congress. Therefore the quote is misleading, if not entirely erroneous. The story is interesting, however, and most of the following discussion is taken from Chapter 8 of Derek H. Davis, ***Religion and the Continental Congress, 1774-1789: Contributions to Original Intent*** (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

A critical lack of Bibles in the states led to the involvement of the Continental Congress in 1777 to solve the problem. No edition of the Bible in the English language had been published in the colonies before Independence. As a result of the war, ministers experienced a lack of Bibles for their services, causing Dr. Patrick Allison, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Baltimore, and a large number of ministers from diverse faiths to petition Congress to do something to remedy the shortage. The petition prayed that “unless timely care be used to prevent it, we shall not have Bibles for our Schools, and families, and for the publick

Worship of God in our Churches. We therefore think it our Duty to our Country and to the Churches of Christ to lay this design before this honourable house, humbly. requesting that under your care, and by your encouragement, a copy of the holy Bible may be printed, so as to be sold nearly as cheap as the Common Bibles, formerly imported from Britain and Ireland, were sold.”

Congress appointed on 11 September 1777 a committee of John Adams, Daniel Roberdeau, and Jonathan Bayard Smith to look into the matter. That same day, the committee returned this report:

The committee to whom the memorial of Dr. Allison and others was referred, report, “That they have conferred fully with the printers, &c., in this city, and are of opinion, that the proper types for printing the Bible are not to be had in this country, and that the paper cannot be procured, but with such difficulties and subject to such casualties, as render any dependence on it altogether improper: that to import types for the purpose of setting up an entire edition of the bible, and to strike off 30,000 copies, with paper. binding &c. will cost ú10,272 10, which must be advanced by Congress, to be reimbursed by the sale of the books: that, in the opinion of the committee, considerable difficulties will attend the procuring the types and paper; that afterwards, the risque of importing them will considerably enhance the cost, and that the calculations are subject to such uncertainty in the present state of affairs, that Congress cannot much rely on them: that the use of the Bible is so universal, and its importance so great, that your committee refer the above to the consideration of Congress, and if Congress shall not think it expedient to order the importation of types and paper, the committee recommend that Congress will order the committee of commerce to import 20,000 Bibles from Holland, Scotland, or elsewhere, into the different ports of the states of the Union.”

In voting upon this report, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Georgia were in favor of acting on the recommendation to import, at Congress’s expense, 20,000 Bibles; New York, Delaware, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland opposed such action. Despite the affirmative vote, the margin of one vote led Congress to table the matter, and no final action was taken.

The reason for the reluctance of six states to approve the measure cannot be determined from available records. There are no available records of Congress’s debate on this question. It can only be determined that Congress was thoroughly divided on this very difficult issue.

Because of the exigencies of war, the matter did not again arise until 1780. Concerned that the demand for Bibles still had not been met, Congress adopted the following resolution on 26 October 1780:

That it be recommended to such of the States who may think it convenient for them that they take proper measures to procure one or more new and correct editions of the Old and New Testament to be printed and that such states regulate their printers by law so as to secure effectually the said books from being misprinted.

In the meantime, Robert Aitken (1734-1802), a patriotic Philadelphia printer and a Presbyterian elder, had proceeded on his own initiative and published an American edition of the Bible. In January 1781, he petitioned Congress for an endorsement of his project and for financial support. He received the former but not the latter. Congress’s endorsement of the Bible without allocating funds for the project is indeed a strong evidence that Congress was

deeply committed to the importance of religion for the new republic, but equally unwillingly, for whatever reason, of becoming financially involved.

Although Congress gave no financial aid to the project, the Pennsylvania legislature advanced \$700 to Aitken to complete the work. The Aitken Bible is now a rare Americanum and greatly sought after. Only about seventy-five copies are known to exist.

In the end, Congress was unwilling, possibly even for its good friend and servant, Robert Aitken, to expend congressional monies on a project that many of the states -found objectionable. Whether this objection centered on the recognition that the Bible could not possibly satisfy all readers across the states, the more principled rationale that congressional financing would violate the states' jurisdiction over religion, the lack of funds to finance the project, or some other reason is uncertain. Laboring without the restraints on its involvement in religion that would follow the passage of the Constitution's First Amendment, Congress probably did not perceive the project as an improper advancement of religion. It did, however, seem to view as one of its primary responsibilities the preservation of the liberty of the various states in matters pertaining to religion. Therefore, it is more likely that Congress believed that because of the likelihood that the Aitken Bible would not appeal to all citizens of the various states, it would be an infringement upon the states' liberty for Congress, which represented all of the states, to expend the monies required to publish the needed Bibles.

3. Patrick Henry's Speech

“Patrick Henry, who is called the firebrand of the American Revolution, is still remembered for his words, ‘Give me liberty or give me death.’ But in current textbooks the context of these words is deleted. Here is what he said: ‘An appeal to arms and the God of hosts is all that is left us. But we shall not fight our battle alone. There is a just God that presides over the destinies of nations. The battle sir, is not to the strong alone. Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it almighty, God. I know not what course other may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death.’ These sentences have been erased from our textbooks.”

This quotation is accurate in that Henry spoke these words, but the quote lacks proper ellipses, and thus gives the impression that his speech was more religious in nature rather than interspersed with general religious notions typical of political speeches of the time. Henry's entire speech can be examined at the website: <http://www.quoteworld.org/docs/phgiv328.php>. What follows is roughly the last half of Henry's speech with only the portions cited above in bold and the omitted portions in regular type:

There is no longer any room for hope. If we wish to be free—if we mean to preserve inviolate those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long contending—if we mean not basely to abandon the noble struggle in which we have been so long engaged, and which we have pledged ourselves never to abandon until the glorious object of our contest shall be obtained—we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight! **An appeal to arms and to the God of hosts is all that is left us!**

They tell us, sir, that we are weak; unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week, or the next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house? Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying supinely on our backs and hugging the delusive phantom of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot'?

Sir, we are not weak if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. The millions of people, armed in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as that which we possess, are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us. Besides, sir, **we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations**, and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave. Besides, sir, we have no election. If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable—and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come.

It is in vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace—but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? **Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!**

Henry's call to arms speech was uttered in March 1775 at St. John's Church in Richmond where the Virginia legislature was meeting. The speech does not give any indication of a strong Christian emphasis; indeed the religious terminology used could easily have been that of a Deist. This might explain why the next section of "Forsaken Roots" begins with the question, "Was Patrick Henry a Christian?"

The idea of God and Christianity being deleted and erased from school textbooks is mentioned throughout the "Forsaken Roots" document. There might be several reasons for this. Textbook publishers do not like to include anything that may create controversy for fear their books will not be selected by public school boards. Textbook publishers therefore tend to minimize religious elements of American history. However, the assertion that references to God are being erased implies a conspiracy to eradicate Christianity from American history and government. The Supreme Court has never ruled that public schools cannot teach about the impact of Christianity in American history and government, but to protect the diversity of beliefs among impressionable school children, the Court has struck down religious instruction and practices in public schools that are intended to inculcate faith. Teaching religious beliefs as something to be adhered to is not the responsibility of government and differs from teaching about Christianity's valuable role in American history. At the following website, http://www.mbbenson.net/Memoranda/Roots_Critique.htm, William Benson gives one simple example of how the "erasure" claim is bogus. He states:

. . . this famous Patrick Henry speech has not been erased from public school text books; at least it hasn't been erased from the history textbook used by the Los Gatos Union School District schools in California. Their history textbook is entitled ***The Americans a History*** and is published by McDougal Little/Houghton Mifflin. The full and unedited text of Henry's speech appears on page 125 of this textbook.

The method of condensing the religious strands in Henry's speech into a short quotable paragraph, while leaving out all the nonreligious aspects, misrepresents the facts and is a method clearly calculated to mislead unsuspecting readers.

4. Patrick Henry's Faith

"Was Patrick Henry a Christian? The following year, 1776, he wrote this: 'It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great Nation was founded not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religious principles, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For that reason alone, people of other faiths have been afforded freedom of worship here.'"

This Henry quote is best answered by Religious Right author David Barton, who appears to be a primary source for many Christians today who pass on quotations without documenting their source. Barton defends his reliance on secondary sources as the origin of this quotation, but admits that no primary source can be found to attribute the quote to Patrick Henry. To read Barton's complete explanation, see <http://www.wallbuilders.com/resources/search/detail.php?ResourceID=20>. Barton admits that this quote is not found in any of Henry's extant writings. He does offer convincing evidence of Henry being a Christian, which is not in dispute here; there is virtual unanimous agreement among scholars that Patrick Henry was a committed Christian. In any case, Barton suggests that the quote is probably Henry's, but also admits that the quote might be attributable to a relative of Henry. Barton writes:

As a final thought, there is a possibility that the unconfirmed quote came from Henry's uncle, the Reverend Patrick Henry. We find no record of the Reverend's letters or writings. Therefore, until more definitive documentation can be presented, please avoid the words in question.

Thus, the quotation might or might not be Henry's. No matter what the quote says about Henry's Christian standing, however, it is better understood as a principled statement that religious freedom is a fundamental Christian precept that should prevail in America.

5. Thomas Jefferson's Christianity

"Consider these words that Thomas Jefferson wrote on the front of his well-worn Bible: 'I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus. I have little doubt that our whole country will soon be rallied to the unity of our Creator and, I hope, to the pure doctrine of Jesus also.' (He supposedly was a Deist but not in the strictest mold)."

This quote has the hallmarks of Jefferson's authorship, but it is not found in any of his writings. The problem with this quote, even if it was Jefferson that actually wrote it, is not its content but what the anonymous compiler/editor interprets it to mean. The parenthetical comment that "He supposedly was a Deist—but not in the strictest mold" assumes he was more Christian than Deist. Several quotes from Jefferson's own hand will tell the truth about what he means by "I am a real Christian" and "the doctrines of Jesus." Here is the context of his statement, "I am a real Christian."

DEAR SIR,—In some of the delightful conversations with you, in the evenings of 1798-99, and which served as an anodyne to the afflictions of the crisis through which our country was then laboring, the Christian religion was sometimes our topic; and then promised you, that one day or other, would give you my views of it. They are the result of a life of inquiry & reflection, and very different from that anti-Christian system imputed to me by those who know nothing of my opinions. To the corruptions of Christianity I am indeed opposed; but not to the genuine precepts of Jesus himself. I am a Christian, in the only sense he wished any one to be; sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others; ascribing to himself every

human excellence; & believing he never claimed any other. (Jefferson, Thomas, *Letters 1760-1826. The Morals of Jesus. To Dr. Benjamin Rush, with a Syllabus, Washington, April 21, 1803*, page 1123. Also, see [“http://etext.virginia.edu/jefferson/texts/](http://etext.virginia.edu/jefferson/texts/) using the search phrase “1 am a Christian.”)

Here Jefferson calls himself a “Christian” and speaks of being attached to the doctrines of Jesus. Jefferson alludes to one of those doctrines by speaking of Jesus only in terms of his humanity. There are some other hints in this paragraph that also indicate his real view of Christianity. Two terms he elaborates upon in this letter and in another are “that anti-Christian system” and “the corruptions of Christianity.” Jefferson considered most of the Christianity of his day to be a corruption of what Jesus really intended. He explained his view of the Bible and of Jesus in the *Syllabus of an Estimate of the Merit of the Doctrines of Jesus, Compared with Those of Others (April 1803)*.

Jefferson, then, like many of the nation’s earliest leaders, is difficult to describe because while he was genuinely religious, he was not specifically Christian. While generally regarded by orthodox Christians of his day as an “infidel,” he was by birth and baptism affiliated with the Church of England and in his early days served as a vestryman. He was a regular attendant at church services and maintained an active interest in religion all of his life.

Late in life Jefferson summarized the basic religious convictions he had held for most of his eighty-four years by affirming that Jesus’ doctrines “tend all to the happiness of man . . . that there is only one God ... that there is a future state of rewards and punishments, that to love God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself, is the sum of religion.” For the remaining Christian fundamentals—Christ’s deity and resurrection, the Trinity, the divine authorship of Scripture, the earthly return of Christ—these were for Jefferson the “deliria of crazy imaginations.” (Quoted in Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George M. Marsden, *The Search for Christian America* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1983), 73).

Also late in life, he wrote James Smith expressing confidence that “the present generation will see Unitarianism become the general religion of the United States.” In a letter to Benjamin Waterhouse that same year, he wrote: “I trust that there is not a young man now living in the United States who will not die a Unitarian.” (Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Waterhouse, 26 June 1822, in Paul Leicester Ford, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 10 vols. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1892-1899), 10:219). And regarding the Bible, he wrote to Peter Carr that it was just another history book, to be read “as you would read Livy or Tacitus.” (Thomas Jefferson to Peter Carr, 10 August 1787, in *ibid.*, 4:427). Jefferson, then, was no atheist, but neither was he an orthodox Christian. He is perhaps best described as an enlightened Deist.

It is obvious that Jefferson did not believe in the divinity of Jesus, the inspiration of the Bible, and that those who claimed to be his followers had actually corrupted the moral utterances of Jesus. Jefferson believed it was possible to take the original fragments of Jesus’ sayings and build a complete moral system out of them consisting of the character of God and His government, moral principles of conduct equally applicable to human motive, and a future state. All of this was to be found in the four gospels only in the words of Jesus Himself after they are purged of later corruptions, much like some modern scholars do in the Jesus Project to find the “historical Jesus.” But these were his thoughts during his presidential years, 1800-08. In later years his commentary became more blunt and caustic. By 1816 Jefferson’s description of “real” Christianity becomes even clearer. Jefferson begins his letter to this friend of fifty-two years by commenting on all they had experienced together and by

congratulating him on his work regarding his “synopsis of the four Evangelists.” After saying he received his work in hand, he admits he has done something himself along the same lines:

I, too, have made a wee-little book from the same materials, which I call the Philosophy of Jesus; it is a paradigma [sic] of his doctrines, made by cutting the texts out of the book, and arranging them on the pages of a blank book, in a certain order of time or subject. A more beautiful or precious morsel of ethics I have never seen; it is a document in proof that *I am a real Christian*, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus, very different from the Platonists, who call *me* infidel and *themselves* Christians and preachers of the gospel, while they draw all their characteristic dogmas from what its author never said nor saw. They have compounded from the heathen mysteries a system beyond the comprehension of man, of which the great reformer of the vicious ethics and deism of the Jews, were he to return on earth, would not recognize one feature. . . . (See Thomas Jefferson, *Letters 1760-1826*, 1373-74; “A Real Christian” *To Charles Thomson, Monticello January 9, 1816*. Emphasis supplied.)

The anonymous compiler/editor of “Forsaken Roots” has mischievously extracted the “I am a real Christian” quote and placed it within the general context of making Jefferson sound more like a Christian than a Deist. The opposite is true, of course.

The last portion of the Jefferson quote states, “I have little doubt that our whole country will soon be rallied to the unity of our Creator and, I hope, to the pure doctrine of Jesus also.” This portion is very likely Jefferson, although it is not to be found among his writings.

6. George Washington on Religion and Government

“Consider these words from George Washington, the Father of our Nation, in his farewell speech on September 19, 1796: ‘It is impossible to govern the world without God and the Bible. Of all the dispositions and habits that lead to political prosperity, our religion and morality are the indispensable supports. Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that our national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.’”

Again, in this case it is best to let David Barton clarify the truth about this quote. Barton presents the first sentence of the quote as: “It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible. George Washington (unconfirmed).” Then Barton goes on to explain why this quote is unconfirmed:

Although the modern secularists avoid his numerous religious maxims, Washington’s views on religion are easily documented. He often spoke on religious themes, to include the ruler of nations, the light of Revelation, and the symbiotic relationship between the Church and the state. There is overwhelming evidence to support this thought as belonging to Washington. However, since the quote has not been documented to date, it appears unlikely to be found. Too much research has been done on the life of Washington to see the prospect of a new quotation.

There is a very real possibility that the quotation has its origin in an 1835 biography by James K. Paulding. In a description of Washington’s character, with supporting quotations, Paulding declares Washington to have said: “It is impossible to account for the creation of the universe without the agency of a Supreme Being. It is impossible to govern the universe without the aid of a Supreme Being.”

The similarities are obvious; a paraphrase of these quotes could have easily generated the words in question. However, we have not been able to trace Paulding's cite to a more scholarly reference. He offers no footnotes. For an extensive selection of Washington's religious sayings, see *The Maxims of Washington: Political, Social, Moral, and Religious*, ed. John F. Schroeder (Mount Vernon, Va.: The Mount Vernon Ladies Association, © 1942). (The book has also been reprinted, albeit in a slightly different format. We recommend the older versions.) (See <http://www.wallbuilders.com/resources/search/detail.php?ResourceID=20>. Emphasis supplied.)

Here again we see that the first sentence is not actually traceable to a primary source, while the rest of the quote is from Washington; but just as with previous quotes, only the portions that are explicitly religious are combined together without ellipses identifying those portions left out. Here is the portion of Washington's Farewell Address with the relevant portions being discussed here in bold print:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labour to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men & citizens. The mere Politician, equally with the pious man ought to respect & to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private & public felicity. Let it simply be asked where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the Oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of justice? **And let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure--reason & experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.**

Tis substantially true, that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule indeed extends with more or less force to every species of Free Government. Who that is a sincere friend to it, can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric.

Promote then as an object of primary importance, Institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened." (Washington's Farewell Address 19th September 1796. From <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/education/life/quest9.htm1>).

Two observations should be made concerning this quote. First, modern accommodationists (those who desire greater accommodation of religion in public life) are understandably pleased by statements like Washington's, since they are evidence that the framers did not intend to withdraw religion from public life. Yet while Washington's statements exalt religion as a necessary support for human government, none of them express the view that it is government itself that must promulgate religion. Such statements might, then, be looked upon as arguments for separationism as much as for accommodationism. Separationists usually look to religion to supply the civic virtue so essential to successful democratic government, but hold that human government should play a limited role, if any role at all, in

promulgating religion as the underlying source of civic virtue. There is strong evidence that many of the Founders decidedly became proponents of this view. Thus, today most separationists contend that it is the private, non-public sphere that must be respected as the domain of religion and that will supply, in turn, the morality and virtue so essential to the successful functioning of democratic government.

Second, a reading of Washington's whole speech will show that his religious sentiments were a very small, but nevertheless significant, portion of a larger argument. The first president, after making remarks about his need to retire from public service, gave observations based on serious reflection concerning those matters "which appear to me all important to the permanency of your felicity as a People . . . you can only see in them the disinterested warnings of a parting friend."

What were these observations? The order in which he described them were: preserving the unity of national government as the common cause of the various states' citizens; the continuance of the complimentary and interdependent natural advantages of the various regions of the country in promoting mutual economic advantages that also serve as a deterrent to foreign interference; the threat to national unity and patriotism by parties based on geographical and regional differences being offset by individual duty to respect the principles of the Constitution; the need to avoid the destructive threat of factions trying to gain control of the national government through the manipulative designs of cunning men; respect for the Constitution's separation of powers with its checks and balances in the administration of the duties of government as a deterrent to usurpation of power; the need for religion and morality among the citizens as public supports for national happiness; sparing use of national debt for the defense of the nation during times of war and national emergency; cultivation of peace, justice, and harmony with all encouraged by religion and morality; eschewing the habitual harboring of the spirit of hatred toward other nations; vigilance against the inroads of foreign influence of other governments; commercial interchange with other nations avoiding political connection to their political affairs and controversies; forming temporary and not permanent alliances with other nations; and limiting favors to other nations to avoid exchanging degrees of America's independence.

Set within this larger context of Washington's vision for the happiness of our nation, it becomes obvious that religion and morality among the citizens is essential to checking human passions that threaten American national security, peace, prosperity, and independence. Washington is not encouraging government to become the engine that inculcates religion and morality in the citizenry.

7. George Washington's Faith

"Was George Washington a Christian? Consider these words from his personal prayer book: 'Oh, eternal and everlasting God, direct my thoughts, words and work. Wash away my sins in the immaculate blood of the lamb and purge my heart by thy holy Spirit. Daily, frame me more and more in the likeness of thy son, Jesus Christ, that living in thy fear, and dying in thy favor, I may in thy appointed time obtain the resurrection of the justified unto eternal life. Bless, O Lord, the whole race of mankind and let the world be filled with the knowledge of thee and thy son, Jesus Christ.'"

If this prayer was in Washington's prayer book it would be easily found in the records of his writings. It is not attributable to Washington and probably was in someone else's prayer book. Washington was a Deist who was also a member of the Episcopal Church. His bishop

testified that he had not witnessed Washington as a communicant (received the Lord's Supper) even though the latter was a faithful churchgoer. (See the website: <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/project/faq/mtvernon.html>).

The following information, which seems reliable and accurate, further explains Washington's religious views and is excerpted from http://www.mbbenson.net/Memoranda/Roots_Critique.htm:

The Bishop's Opinion:

As to whether Washington was a devout or pious Christian, here is what Bishop White the father of the Protestant Episcopal Church of America opines. In response to a letter dated Fredericksburg, Aug. 13, 1835, Colonel Mercer sent Bishop White the following inquiry relative to this question:

"I have a desire, my dear Sir, to know whether Gen. Washington was a communicant of the Protestant Episcopal church, or whether he occasionally went to the communion only, or if ever he did so at all . . . No authority can be so authentic and complete as yours on this point."

To this inquiry Bishop White replied as follows:

"Philadelphia, Aug. 15, 1835

Dear Sir: In regard to the subject of your inquiry, truth requires me to say that Gen. Washington never received the communion in the churches of which I am the parochial minister. Mrs. Washington was an habitual communicant . . . I have been written to by many on that point, and have been obliged to answer them as I now do you. I am respectfully.

Your humble servant,

WILLIAM-WHITE."

(Memoir of Bishop White, pp. 196, 197).

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In the absence of any recorded statements from Washington himself concerning his religious belief, the most conclusive evidence that can be presented is the admissions of his clerical acquaintances. Among these there has been preserved the testimony of his pastors, Bishop White and Dr. Abercrombie.

In a letter to Rev. B.C.C. Parker of Massachusetts, dated Nov. 28, 1832, in answer to some inquiries respecting Washington's religion, Bishop White says:

"His behavior [in church] was always serious and attentive, but as your letter seems to intend an inquiry on the point of kneeling (during the service, I owe it to the truth to declare that I never saw him in the said attitude . . . Although I was often in company with this great man, and had the honor of dining often at his table, I never heard anything from him which could manifest his opinions on the .subject of religion . . . Within a few days of his leaving the presidential chair, our vestry waited on him with an address prepared and delivered by me. In his answer he was pleased to express himself gratified by what he had heard from our pulpit; but there was nothing that committed him relatively to religious theory" ("Memoir of Bishop White," pp. 189-191; Sparks' Life of Washington," Vol. ii., p. 359).

The Prayer Book and Prayer Controversy:

I consulted three authorities: (1) TruthorFiction.com (which quotes from John C. Fitzpatrick's collection of the writings of George Washington at the University of Virginia); (2) *George Washington Resources: The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799* at the University of Virginia Library; and (3) the George Mason University History Department;

TruthorFiction.com reports:

“There is a certain lack of integrity with the prayer . . . in that he (Washington) never really formally prayed it in the way that is circulated. Someone along the way decided to create the prayer from one of Washington's letters and packaged it in the fabricator's own religious cultural language. The original words from Washington are from the closing paragraph of a letter to the governors of the 13 states on the occasion of his retirement from command of the Continental Army and public life.

We consulted John C. Fitzpatrick's collection of the writings of George Washington that are available through the University of Virginia Library and which includes the text of the letter. In the letter, Washington said that he wanted the governors to convey his words to their legislatures and that he hoped it would be regarded as coming from someone who always wished to be useful to his country and who in the shade of retirement would not fail to “implore divine benediction upon it.”

Then his final paragraph contains the words of his benediction:

“I now make it my earnest prayer, that God would have you, and the State over which you preside, in his holy protection, that he would incline the hearts of the Citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to Government, to entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another, for their fellow Citizens of the United States at large, and particularly for their brethren who have served in the Field, and finally, that he would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all, to do Justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that Charity, humility and pacific temper of mind, which were the Characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed Religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy Nation.”

The prayer that is circulated, however, adds a formal salutation and prayer ending, changes it to King James English (used for formal prayers among many Christian groups), changes some of the wording, and leaves out words from the original. A blessing that was written to the governors of the states about their states and their soldiers was changed to be a general prayer about the country. We even found one reference that claimed the prayer was prayed by George Washington during battle at Valley Forge.

8. John Adams' Faith

“Consider these words by John Adams, our second present [sic], who also served as chairman of the American bible [sic] Society. In an address to military leaders he said: ‘We have no government armed with the power capable of contending with human passions, unbridled by morality and true religion. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.’”

John Quincy Adams (arguably the only Christian among the first seven presidents) and not *John Adams* was the chairman of the American Bible Society. This quote is attributable to John Adams, but again it lacks an ellipsis that helps to establish its true import. The actual quote is from Adams' *Address to the Military* on October 11, 1798 with the deleted portion in regular type:

We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. **Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.**

Here Adams offers the idea that the national form of government established by the Constitution was not designed to hold human passions under control, but it was designed with separation of powers attended with checks and balances so that passion will cancel out passion as asserted by James Madison in *The Federalist* papers. Similar to George Washington's understanding, Adams sees religion and morality within the individual as an essential influence to contend with the passions of individuals and factions so that such passions do not usurp the power of government to violate the Constitutional order. Therefore, our Constitutional order is unable to contend with the inner motives of men's hearts and can only deal with the actions resulting from such motives. Religion and morality were viewed by many of the Founders as a power capable of contending with the inner motives of the mind, something laws cannot possibly do.

9. John Jay's Faith

"How about our first Supreme Court Justice, John Jay? He stated that when we select our national leaders, if we are to preserve our Nation, we must select Christians: 'Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian Nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.'"

This undocumented quote can be found in *The Correspondence and Papers of John Jay*, ed. Henry P. Johnston (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1890), Vol. IV, p. 393, Oct. 12, 1816, and at the website: http://www.mbbenson.net/Memoranda/Roots_critique.htm. Jay's statement expresses his own view that Christians should run the country. This is not inconsistent with the principle that the Constitution and the laws of government nevertheless leave the citizens free to select and vote for anyone they favor for office. Nothing in our government keeps individuals from choosing people of their own denomination, of general Christian faith, or persons of non-Christian religions, or even atheists for public office. Jay thought it a duty, but some may see it as merely a privilege, to elect Christians to office. Jay's comment is not part of any Supreme Court decisions and is not a matter of law. Indeed the Constitution (Article VI, Clause 3) prohibits formal religious tests for holding federal office.

10. John Quincy Adams on Church and State

"John Quincy Adams, son of John Adams, was the sixth U. S. President. He was also the chairman of the American Bible Society, which he considered his highest and most important role. On July 4, 1821, President Adams said: 'The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity.'"

Again, David Barton can help with this quote. From his website, <http://www.wallbuilders.com/resources/search/detail.php?ResourceID=20>, we have the following comments:

Here is yet another quote that has circulated for many years. Its source can be traced to John Wingate Thornton's *The Pulpit of the American Revolution*, which was published in 1860. This quote was published only 15 years after JQA's death, and is entirely consistent with JQA's numerous July 4th Orations. For example, in his 1837 Oration at Newburyport, Massachusetts, answering why we celebrate the birthday of our nation, Adams stated:

“Why is it that, next to the birth day of the Saviour of the World, your most joyous and most venerated festival returns on this day [July 4th]? . . . Is it not that, in the chain of human events, the birthday of the nation is indissolubly linked with the birth-day of the Saviour? That it forms a leading event in the progress of the gospel dispensation? Is it not that the Declaration of Independence first organized the social compact on the inundation of the Redeemer's mission upon earth? That it laid the corner stone of human government upon the first precepts of Christianity . . . ?

The entire Newburyport Oration is actually a political sermon where one might expect to read the quote in question. The idea is there; the tone is there; although the exact words are not. We no longer use this quote although we believe it is an accurate paraphrase based upon the author either hearing or reading JQA's 1837 Newburyport Oration.

In other words, the quote sounds like something John Quincy Adams would say, but it is not exactly what he is known to have said in any of his extant writings. In sum, Barton's claim is based on oral history.

Adams's statement suggests that the principles of Christianity are part and parcel of the principles of the United States government. But the Constitution and its fountain of laws are not designed to make people religious or even Christian. The Constitution was a document naming the people, not God, as the creators and overseers of the government formed by it. Although the Founders were deeply suspicious of pure democracy and, for some like Alexander Hamilton, even of the participation of the populace within the government process, they nevertheless had a strong sense of “the people” as the source of political authority. John Adams explained that “in every government there must exist somewhere, a supreme, sovereign, absolute, and uncontrollable power; but this power resides always in the body of the people.” (John Adams in “Proclamation of the Great and General Court,” in C.F. Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams*, 10 vols. (Boston: Chipman Publishing Co., 1850-1856), 1:193). Adams was particularly cautious against ascribing, sacred legitimation to political arrangements, and wondered whether such justification was the only way to elicit man's obedience to political laws. He referred to the United States as the first government to be erected upon “the simple principles of nature” instead of the more usual attribution to divine origin. Hamilton contended that the fatal flaw of the Continental Congress regime and the Articles of Confederation was that they never had received the mandate or ratification of the people. Thus it would be left up to the federal constitution to ensure that the ultimate political authority remained with the people simultaneously ensuring that no one person or body of persons could obtain unassailable decision-making power.

In 1787, within the whole of Western political culture, the secularity of the Constitution of the

United States was indeed isolated anomaly. Religious establishments reigned all over Europe, not just Great Britain. The U. S. Constitution, then, can rightly be viewed as the document that marked the real beginning of political modernity. Government was now to be mostly a human affair; God might lend a helping providential hand, but the formation, maintenance, and dissolution of governments rested with men, not with angels. As the devout Congregationalist from Connecticut, Oliver Ellsworth, saw it, “the business of civil government is to protect the citizen in his rights, to defend the community from hostile powers and to promote the general welfare.” (*The Connecticut Courant*, 17 December 1787, “To the Landholders and Farmers” by “A Landholder” (Oliver Ellsworth)). Noticeably absent from his description was any attempt to place the new government under divine rule.

The seemingly secular character of the new Constitution also rested to some degree on the tendency of many of the leading thinkers of the day to analogize it to the manner in which God himself was thought to govern the universe. With the spread of Enlightenment rationalism, the pervading theological metaphor for God’s method of controlling the universe was a constitutional paradigm. This provided the political leaders with a vocabulary they could use to express the new concepts of a federal constitutional government. Thus Americans could accept Thomas Paine’s characterization of the republican system of government as “always parallel with the order and immutable laws of nature, and meets the reason of man in every part.” (Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man (Representative Selections)*, ed. H. H. Clark (New York: Heritage Press, 1961), 195). Madison also could defend the idea of a constitutional government by appealing to its progenitor as God, “the supreme lawgiver of the universe.” And John Adams would note to Jefferson that the “general principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God; and that those principles of liberty are as unalterable as human nature and our terrestrial, mundane system.” (Madison, “*Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments (1785)*” in Charles Hyneman and Donald S. Lutz, eds., *American Political Writings During the Founding Era, 1760-1805* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Press, 1983), 637). The kind of constitutionalism conceived by the founders was infused with a divine imprimatur—a necessary advantage to obtain and sustain the support in the hearts and minds of the people. Thus the new Constitution was never presented as a completely secular document; the idea of the providential hand of God’s was consistently retained. This image was effectively used by James Madison in Federalist No. 37 when arguing for acceptance of the federal constitution: “It is impossible, for the man of pious reflection, not to perceive in it a finger of that Almighty Hand, which has been so frequently and signally extended to our relief in the critical stages in the revolution.”

The concept of a federal constitution was in turn planted and nurtured within the minds of the people through the sermons of the clergy and their tendency to analogize an earthly constitution to a divine constitution. God was presented as governing the universe according to the laws of a constitution which he himself established, in keeping with his own rational nature.

All of this points to a federal system of government that had only begun to be formulated in separationist terms during the constitutional era. There were strong objections to the apparent secularity of the document, but those who understood it knew that it was in no way hostile to religion. As Walter Berns has noted, the Constitution was ordained to secure liberty and its blessing’s, not to acknowledge God or even move people to faith in God. (Walter Berns, “Religion and the Founding Principle,” in Robert H. Horwitz, ed., *The Moral Foundations of*

the American Republic, 3rd ed. (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1986), 214). Had the framers desired to create a Christian commonwealth, calculated to cause Americans to endeavor to keep God's laws, they could easily have done so. But they chose not to because in their minds, the government derived not from God but from the people. Religion was to be subordinate to liberty; liberty was to free all persons to exercise their faith absent government prescription. As Berns insightfully asserts, "instead of establishing religion, the Founders established religious freedom. . . ." (Ibid., 215). Because the nation was not founded on religious truth, it would act to protect the right of all citizens to believe and act upon divergent views of religious truth. Religious liberty was a natural human right, with which the federal government had no right or authority to interfere.

11. The Faith of Calvin Coolidge

"Calvin Coolidge, our 30th President of the United States, reaffirmed this truth when he wrote: 'The foundations of our society and our government rest so much on the teachings of the Bible that it would be difficult to support them if faith in thee [sic] teachings would cease to be practically universal in our country.'"

The phrase "support them" is open to interpretation based on what the antecedent is. Notice that Coolidge either means that faith in the teachings of the Bible cannot be supported by the foundations of our society and government if most people no longer personally believe in those foundations or that faith in the teachings of the Bible cannot be supported by the foundations of our society if most people no longer personally believe in those teachings. Either way it is understood, both hinge on the majority of the people believing those teachings, but without the context of the quote it is not possible to establish what he thinks are those teachings of the Bible. Remember, even Jefferson had a view of what teachings from the Bible were to be followed and these surely differed from Coolidge's.

12. Bible in the Schools

"In 1782, the United States Congress voted this resolution: 'The Congress of the United States recommends and approves the Holy Bible for use in all schools.'"

It was the Continental Congress and not the national Congress that governed the states in 1782. Therefore the resolution predates the Constitution's restrictions on "establishing" religion. In any case, the resolution is merely a recommendation and not a law. In 1782 it would have applied essentially to private schools since there were few public schools in operation at the time. Under current law, of course, there is no prohibition on using the Bible in the public schools, provided it is done to teach religion objectively and not to inculcate faith.

13. McGuffey's Readers

"William Holmes McGuffey is the author of the McGuffey Readers, which was used for over 100 years in our public schools with over 125 million copies sold until it was stopped in 1963. President Lincoln called him the 'Schoolmaster of the Nation.' Listen to these words of Mr. McGuffey: 'The Christian religion is the religion of our country. From it are derived our notions on the character of God, on the great moral Governor of the universe. On its doctrines are founded the peculiarities of our free institutions. From no source has the author drawn more conspicuously than from the sacred Scriptures. From all these extracts from the Bible I make no apology.'"

Drawing ideas and principles from the Bible is not the same as legislating the Bible and its

contents. Without the context of this quote, it is not possible to establish what McGuffrey means by “doctrines” that founded our free institutions. Some of our freedoms came from ancient sources such as the Greeks and Romans where paganism reigned. Christianity is still the majority religion of the United States, notwithstanding how secular the national and state governments have become. Inculcating general Protestant religious beliefs was a common practice in the public schools of a number of states until the incorporation doctrine commenced to apply the religion clauses of the First Amendment to the states in the 1940s. This process steadily led the Supreme Court to eliminate what once was permissible by state laws but was never permissible under federal laws.

14. Christianity and Education

“Of the first 108 universities founded in America, 106 were distinctly Christian, including the first, Harvard University, chartered in 1636. In the original Harvard Student Handbook, rule number one was that students seeking entrance must know Latin and Greek so that they could study Scripture: ‘Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life, John 17:3: and therefore to lay Jesus Christ as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning. And seeing the Lord only giveth wisdom, let every one seriously set himself by prayer in secret to seek it of him. (Proverbs 2:3)’

For over 100 years, more than .50% of all Harvard graduates were pastors! It is clear from history that the Bible and the Christian faith were foundational to our educational and judicial system. However, in 1947, there was a radical change of direction for the Supreme Court. It required ignoring every precedent of Supreme Court ruling for the past 160 years. The Supreme Court ruled in a limited way to affirm a wall of separation between church and State in the public classroom. In the coming years, this led to removing prayer from public schools in 1962. Here is the prayer that was banished: ‘Almighty Cod, we acknowledge our dependence on Thee. We beg Thy blessing upon its and our parents and our teachers and our country. Amen.’

In 1963, the Supreme Court ruled that Bible reading was outlawed as unconstitutional in the public school system. The court offered this justification: ‘If portions of the New Testament were read without explanation, they could and have been psychologically harmful to children.’ Bible reading was not unconstitutional, though the Bible was quoted 94 percent of the time by those who wrote our Constitution and shaped our Nation and its system of education and justice and government.

In 1965, the Courts denied as unconstitutional the right of a student in the public school cafeteria to bow his head and pray audibly for his food. In 1980, Stone vs. Graham outlawed the Ten Commandments in our public schools. The Supreme Court said this: ‘If the posted copies of the Tell Commandments were to have any effect at all, it would be to induce school children to read them. And if they read them, meditated upon them, and perhaps venerated and obeyed them, this is not a permissible objective.’

It is not a permissible objective to allow our children to follow the moral principles of the Ten Commandments?’

This great deal of material and space does not permit us to deal with these matters extensively, so we shall address just a few basic points. To begin with, the notion that 106 of the first 108 colleges and universities in America were “distinctly Christian” is patently false. In fact, of the sixteen colleges that were created in the colonies before Independence in 1776,

five were strictly non-sectarian and might be called what we refer to today as secular universities. These were the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Delaware, the College of Charleston, Hamden Sydney College, and William and Lee University. It is true, of course, that many of the earliest colleges, like Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Brown, all were established as Christian colleges and were training centers for Protestant clergymen. That many of these universities have abandoned much of their early Christian emphasis hardly means that they are antagonistic toward religion but rather reflects the expansion of human knowledge and the need for these universities to become truly “universal” in their attention to the expansion of information about the world. Moreover, that these colleges have abandoned their early Christian connections hardly means that they have not been replaced by a growing number of sectarian colleges and universities across the nation. The opportunities to attend “distinctly Christian” colleges and universities in America today are virtually unlimited.

The removal of sectarian religious practices in the public schools by the Supreme Court beginning in the 1950s was a recognition of the increased religious pluralism in the nation and the consequent need to protect the religious commitments of all American students. These cases do not deny free exercise rights of students, such as the right to pray or read the Bible during lunch or recess, but only deny to state authorities the power to make students religious according to a particular religious perspective. There is a false but nevertheless widespread belief that when the Supreme Court ruled in 1962 that the prayer advocated by the New York State Board of Regents was unconstitutional, it ended an uninterrupted practice of Christian religious activities in the nation's public schools. In fact, the states were already moving in that direction; in 1962 eleven states, either by statute, constitutional mandate, or court decision already had banned vocal prayers in the public school classrooms. Thus the High Court was only acknowledging what the states were increasingly recognizing: it is inappropriate to give to the state the authority to advance sectarian religion in the nation's common schools in ways that will violate the religious beliefs of the students. Many Christians understand these decisions as entirely consistent with ethical Christian conduct.

The Supreme Court did not outlaw children following the Ten Commandments, but rather the practice of *using the government to facilitate* belief and obedience to them.

15. James Madison and the Ten Commandments

“James Madison, the primary author of the Constitution of the United States, said this: ‘We have staked the whole future of our new nation, not upon the power of government; far from it. We have staked the future of all our political constitutions upon the capacity of each of ourselves to govern ourselves according to the moral principles of the Ten Commandments.’”

Here is another quote best handled by the person who inspired many Christians to parrot them around the country without *primary* or *secondary* documentary support. David Barton admits that this quote cannot be traced to Madison. Barton offers no evidence of any secondary sources for this quote, only primary sources touching the subject of religion and self-government. He also suggests that the quote may be from a relative or some other person. Most of his explanation is a defense of his belief that Madison could have said it, but probably did not. The point is that Madison did not write these words. (See # 4 of “Unconfirmed Quotations” by Barton available online at: <http://www.wallbuilders.com/resources/search/detail.php?ResourceID=20>).

16. Historical Revisionism

“Today, we are asking God to bless America. But, how can He bless a Nation that has departed so far from Him? Prior to September 11, 2001 He was not welcome in America. Most of what you read in this article has been erased from our textbooks. Revisionists have rewritten history to remove the truth about our country’s Christian roots. You are encouraged to print this article, make copies and share this with others, so that the truth of our nation’s history will be told.”

What the Founders understood as principles rooted in Christianity are not the same as what some people will understand them to be from all the above quotations. The assemblage of quotes and misattribution of quotes to the Founders does not lend to the firm conclusion that the anonymous compiler/editor truly knows what he/she is talking about when it comes to the Founders’ thoughts and intended meanings. Perhaps if Christians spent more time focusing on living out their faith rather than relying on the government and its laws to make the nation righteous, genuine righteousness would increase and have a far greater-impact on the nation.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Many of the quotations critiqued here fail to make a proper distinction between spiritual and temporal ends. Christ perfectly modeled this distinction. He never advocated the overthrow of the Roman government, or even its adjustment, in favor of a more theocratic order. He never identified Himself with any particular form of government, nor did He even remotely suggest that it was the duty of human government to aid His mission. The temporal was for him far less important than the eternal; thus He focused on the spiritual rather than the physical aspects of Kingdom building. The idea of a “Christian” nation, it seems, was foreign to him.

Christians in America, it seems, frequently become too concerned with the need for government to become identified with Christian principles. Many Christians wrongly believe that Christianity will flourish in a more Christian political environment. History shows the opposite to be true. Christianity grew more rapidly than at any time in history in the first three centuries after Christ’s death when Christians were persecuted for not bowing the knee to Caesar. Christians understandably sought more favorable political conditions for themselves. By the fourth century, Christianity was so widespread that it became impossible to control it by means of outright persecution; the emperor Constantine placed it on a neutral basis with other religions in 313 A.D., and in 380 A.D. Theodosius made it the official religion of the empire. The faith thereafter lost much of its vitality, distinctiveness, and vigor, owing to its preferred political status. Merged with government, Christianity became consumed with temporal affairs—armies, police, crime, taxation, commerce, economics, etc. and less focused on the mission outlined for it by Christ and the apostles. In its witness, the Church gradually began to rely less on the power of its spiritual message than on the power of the sword to enforce its political will. The persecuted had turned persecutor. In some ways this is the same path today’s Christian Right would have us unwittingly follow.

The Bible does not require that political and governmental affairs be Christian. Thus, Christians are free to join with non-Christians in our democratic form of government to make laws that from the perspective of the American people as a whole, not from the perspective of their own interpretation of the Bible, best ensure the common good. In this process, negotiation and compromise are not dirty words, and Christians should be satisfied with laws that fall short of biblical standards as they understand them. Biblical standards may dictate the contributions that Christians make toward the formation of laws if they believe their views

advance the common good, but Christians do not fail God if the negotiated products, even laws on such controversial areas as school prayer, do not meet their standards. The ever-widening religious pluralism that is America is not, according to this model, a threat. Indeed, religious pluralism pursuant to this model is something to be celebrated rather than denigrated because the religious views of all citizens are given equal standing under the law. The goal, even duty, of Christians should be to respect non-Christians' equal ownership of the nation, and to assist the government in the promotion of the welfare of all American citizens based upon a shared morality, not to set up a Kingdom of God on earth. It was Reinhold Niebuhr who said that it is the achievement of democracy, not a sectarian political agenda, which is the heart of a Christian public philosophy.

Meanwhile, Christians should vigorously pursue the spiritual mission of the Church, which is to do good to all people (Galatians 6:10), and to spread the gospel (Matthew 28:19-20). They might call upon the government to assist them in the first task, but not in the second. They can expect government to assist those who struggle against the common enemies of man—tyranny, poverty, disease, and war—but to expect the government, or to attempt to use the government, to spread the gospel or advance a divine message is a perspective that is absolutely foreign to the New Testament. In fulfilling the first task, Christians participate with other citizens who share membership in our nation. In fulfilling the second, they look only to the Christian community, what the apostle Peter called a “holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9). This approach pays a healthy respect to the principle of separation between church and state. If Christians want absolute freedom to spread the gospel, they must refuse to make America a religious state with the authority to define its religious character in ways that might impede their ability to determine God's truth for themselves and to share it with others.