

Religion and the Constitution

by John G. West

John G. West is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Seattle Pacific University, and a Senior Fellow at Discovery Institute. His books include *The Politics of Revelation and Reason: Religion and Civic Life in the New Nation* and *The Encyclopedia of Religion in American Politics* (co-editor).

The following essay appears as a chapter in *In God We Trust? Religion and American Political Life*, edited by Corwin E. Smidt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

The American Constitution: Godly or Godless?

The Constitutional Convention had been meeting for only a few weeks when the crisis erupted. Delegates from the four smaller states demanded equal representation in the Senate, fearful their rights would be trampled upon without it. Delegates from the larger states balked, and the small state delegates threatened to walk out. Tempers flared, members of the Convention insulted each other, and deliberations deadlocked.

Just as the Convention seemed about to disintegrate, the oldest delegate rose to speak. At 82, Benjamin Franklin was already the stuff of which legends are made, and he was accorded more than a little deference by the rest of the Convention. “[T]he very heavens obey him, and the clouds yield up the lightning to be imprisoned in his rod,” wrote fellow delegate William Pierce in awe. (Farrand 1966, III: 91)

Franklin proposed a three-day adjournment to cool tempers, supplemented by the hiring of a chaplain, who would “introduce the business of each day by an address to the *Creator of the universe*... beseeching Him to preside in our council, enlighten our minds with a portion of heavenly wisdom, ...and crown our labors with complete and abundant success!” (Farrand 1966, III: 471)

The youngest delegate at the Convention, 27-year-old Jonathan Dayton from New Jersey, continues the story:

The words of the venerable Franklin fell upon our ears with a weight and authority, even greater than we may suppose an oracle to have had in a Roman senate! A silent admiration superseded, for a moment, the expression of that assent and approbation which was strongly marked on almost every countenance; I say *almost*, for *one* man was found in the Convention, Mr. H—, from —, who rose and said, with regard to the first motion of the honorable gentleman, for an *adjournment*, he would yield his assent; but he protested against the second motion, for the appointment of a chaplain. He then commenced a high-strained eulogium on the assemblage of *wisdom, talent and experience*, which the Convention embraced... and concluded by saying, that therefore he did not see the necessity of calling in *foreign aid!* (Farrand 1966, III: 471-472)

Ignoring “this impertinent and impious speech,” according to Dayton, Washington and the rest of the Convention immediately ratified both the call for a chaplain and an adjournment. The subsequent recess was spent in “free and frank” consultations, the result of which appeared in the morning session three days later. As soon as the chaplain had closed his prayer, a compromise was secured on the organization of the Senate according to the present plan.

Thus occurred the miracle at Philadelphia. At the very point the Convention was about to break apart, passion and self-interest gave way to reason and self-sacrifice as delegates humbled themselves before the Supreme Lawgiver of the Universe. Or so it

was supposed by those who read the above account, which first appeared in the respected *National Intelligencer* in 1826. (Farrand 1966, III: 467, n. 1) Evangelicals quickly appropriated the story in order to vindicate the pious character of the Founding. Here was positive proof that the Framers had remembered God while drafting the Constitution.

The fact that prayers were initially proposed by a Unitarian rather than a Christian proved but a minor irritant. Evangelical Thomas Grimké equated Dr. Franklin with the Biblical Cornelius, the Roman centurion in Acts 10 who believed in one God. Grimké added that subsequent events at the Convention bore witness that God had heard the delegates' prayers. "The result must convince us, that the supplications of our Cornelius and of his fellow-worshippers, were 'had in remembrance before God,'" declared Grimké in a Fourth of July oration in 1833. "Order arose out of chaos; Light, out of darkness; Discord was exchanged for Unanimity; the jealous, proud and selfish States, became bound to each other, as by the indissoluble bond of perpetual wedlock...." (Grimké 1833, 15)

There was only one problem with this account, as James Madison pointed out to Grimké in a letter in 1834: It wasn't true. (Farrand 1966, III: 531) Franklin had made the speech, but his proposal for prayers had been tabled. (Farrand 1966, III: 531; Madison 1987, 209-210)¹ In some respects, however, the truth or falsity of the narrative was the least interesting part of the affair. The extraordinary thing was that Americans should even be interested in prayer at the Constitutional Convention. The Constitution expressly forbade religious tests for national office, and by the 1820s tax support for churches had ended in every state but one. Yet American Christians remained insatiably curious about the religious beliefs of the Founding Fathers and the relationship between religion and the

Constitution.

The politics of the time helps explain why. By the 1830s, evangelical Protestants in America were coming under sharp criticism for their involvement in public life. (West 1996, 134-136) When evangelical reformers objected to the opening of post offices on Sundays because they believed it violated religious liberty, they were accused of being traitors to the Constitution by Congressman (later Vice-President) Richard Johnson. (Johnson 1834, I: 229-231) When missionaries sought to defend the treaty rights of the Cherokee, they were similarly labelled “canting fanatics” by Congressman Wilson Lumpkin. (Lumpkin 1907, 68) Freethinker Frances Wright, meanwhile, told audiences around the country that Christianity was nothing more than superstition and urged them to withdraw their support from churches and religious charities. (D’Arusmont 1972, 45-46, 65-66) It is little wonder that evangelicals during this period sought reassurance that Christianity was a legitimate part of America’s constitutional order. The result was a lively and ongoing debate about religion and the Constitution that continues to the present day.

On one side of this debate have been advocates of what might be termed the “Christian Constitution” thesis. In their view, America’s Constitution was intended to establish a Christian republic where the government operated under God’s laws, where Christianity (or at least religion in general) was encouraged by the government, and where faith played a key role in the nation’s public life. According to advocates of this position, all of America’s Founding Fathers may not have been Christians, but they were overwhelmingly influenced by a Christian worldview and regarded Christianity as fundamental to a healthy political order. The Rev. Jaspar Adams provided a classic

articulation of this position during the 1830s in his widely read sermon, “The Relation of Christianity to Civil Government in the United States.” (Dreisbach 1996a)² The Christian Constitution thesis continues to resonate among many evangelical Christians today, popularized by David Barton in videos such as “America’s Godly Heritage” and Christian pop singer Carman in his song “American Again.” (Barton 1995; Carman 1998) More nuanced versions of this argument have been offered over the past couple of decades by theologian Francis Schaeffer, constitutional lawyer John Whitehead, and educators Gary Amos and Richard Gardiner in their book *Never Before in History: America’s Inspired Birth*. (Schaeffer 1981; Whitehead 1982, 190; Amos and Gardiner 1998)³ According to Amos and Gardiner, “Christianity was a central and pervasive force in the early development of America, and the political principles enshrined in our Founding documents can be directly traced to the Christian context of the Founders.” (Amos and Gardiner 1998, v)

Taking up the other side of the debate have been proponents of what some have provocatively termed the “godless Constitution.” (Kramnick and Moore, 1996) In their understanding, the Constitution’s Framers intended to establish a purely secular republic where religion would be largely confined to the private sphere. According to Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, “the principal framers of the American political system wanted no religious parties in national politics. They crafted a constitutional order that intended to make a person’s religious convictions, or his lack of religious convictions, irrelevant in judging the value of his political opinion or in assessing his qualifications to hold political office.” (Kramnick and Moore, 23) Advocates of this view usually argue that America’s Founders were predominantly Enlightenment figures who

were either nominally religious or avowed skeptics. In the words of historian Gordon Wood, “at the best the Founding Fathers only passively believed in organized Christianity and at worst they scorned and ridiculed it.” (Wood 1980, 359) Walter Berns goes further, claiming that the Founders believed that religion had to be “reformed and rendered harmless” in the new republic they created and arguing that one of their goals was “the subordination of religion.” (Berns 1986, 214, 243)

As we will see, variations of these two views have played a role in most of the discussions involving religion and the Constitution throughout American history, whether those discussions have focused on the religious beliefs of the Constitution’s Framers, the treatment of religion in the Constitution’s text, or the role of religion in the political theory of the Constitution.

Religious Beliefs of the Framers of the Constitution

Interest in the religious beliefs of America’s Founding Fathers dates back at least to the Adams-Jefferson presidential contest of 1800, when one of the major campaign controversies focused on the religious beliefs of candidate Thomas Jefferson. Opponents of Jefferson painted the election as a stark choice between “God and a Religious President” and “Jefferson and no God.” (Miller 1960, 265 n. 34) Ironically, both John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were Unitarians, but Adams hid his heterodox beliefs more effectively than Jefferson. (West 1996, 49-53, 56-67) By the 1830s, controversy had erupted over whether George Washington was a Christian. In the pages of the *New York Free Inquirer*, freethinker Robert Dale Owen claimed that Washington was a deist, and in lecture halls his associate Frances Wright boldly asserted that “Washington was not a

Christian... he believed not in the priest's God, nor in the divine authority of the priest's book." (Boller 1963, 15-16)⁴ Defenders of Washington's piety responded in 1836 with *The Religious Opinions and Character of Washington*, a 414-page tome by E.C. McGuire that depicted the General as devoted to constant prayer, the frequent taking of Communion, and the diligent observance of the Christian sabbath. (McGuire 1836)

Interest in the religious beliefs of the Founding Fathers has continued up to the present, generating books with such titles as *'In God We Trust': The Religious Beliefs and Ideas of the American Founding Fathers*, *Faith of Our Fathers: Religion and the New Nation*, and *The Faith of Our Founding Fathers*. (Cousins 1958; Gaustad 1987; LaHaye 1987; also see Johnson 1919; Eidsmoe 1987; Boller 1963)

Contrary to depictions of the Founding generation as dominated by Deists and apologists of the Enlightenment, nearly all of the Founders who participated in the Constitutional Convention had ties to traditional Christian churches. The Episcopal Church claimed the majority of delegates (29), while Presbyterians and Congregationalists were the next best represented groups, claiming nine and seven delegates, respectively. Most remaining delegates were affiliated with the Methodist, Lutheran, or Dutch Reformed churches. Two members of the Convention—Daniel Carroll of Maryland and Thomas FitzSimmons of Pennsylvania—were Roman Catholics. (Bradford 1982) There was only one confirmed Unitarian among the group—Benjamin Franklin—and he refrained from speaking openly about his beliefs. (West 1996, 15-25)

Some of the Framers were probably only nominally Christian, but others took their spiritual commitments very seriously. Two delegates had been clergymen, and several others were active lay leaders in their respective churches. Congregationalist Abraham

Baldwin had been a licensed preacher and served as a military chaplain during the Revolutionary War. In 1781, he was even offered a professorship of divinity at Yale, but he declined the post and became a lawyer instead. (Bradford 1982, 214) Episcopalian William Johnson (future President of the institution now known as Columbia University) helped organize the Protestant Episcopal Church in America during the later years of his life. (Bradford 1982, 34) Episcopalian Charles Cotesworth Pinckney eventually served as the President of the Charleston Bible Society and as a Vice President of the American Bible Society. (Zahniser 1967, 272) Methodist Richard Bassett of Maryland was perhaps one of the delegates most active in lay ministry. A close friend of Bishop Francis Asbury, Bassett freed his slaves under the influence of Methodist teaching. “Mr. Bassett is a religious enthusiast,” wrote fellow delegate William Pierce. “...He is a Man of plain sense, and has modesty enough to hold his Tongue. He is... in high estimation among the Methodists.” (Farrand 1966, III: 93)

The religious beliefs of some of the better known leaders at the Convention are more difficult to uncover. Convention President George Washington was an active member and vestryman of the Episcopal Church, and he clearly believed in a personal God who intervenes in human affairs. However, he refrained from partaking of Holy Communion during at least certain parts of his adult life, and his beliefs about the divinity of Christ are unclear. (West 1996, 36-41) The religious beliefs of James Madison are even murkier. He had studied under the Rev. John Witherspoon at the Presbyterian College of New Jersey, and he spent his college days wondering about whether his name was “enrolled in the Annals of Heaven.” (Hutchinson and Frachal 1962, I: 75) But surviving writings from Madison’s later years give little indication of either his religious

beliefs or practices as an adult. (West 1996, 67-73)

How the religious beliefs of the Framers influenced their political beliefs is unclear in many cases, but in a few individuals connections can be drawn. James Wilson, probably the most gifted legal theorist among the Founders, developed a comprehensive view of law and society that drew on the Christian natural law tradition (largely via the works of Anglican Richard Hooker) and emphasized the importance of setting up a society where reason, conscience, and the Bible teach the same duties and by their combined efforts move society in the right direction. (McCloskey 1967, I: 144)⁵

Religion and the Text of the Constitution

Whatever the personal religious beliefs of the Framers may have been, a more important issue is how religion was dealt with in the actual constitutional text. When examining the text of the original Constitution, perhaps the most remarkable feature relating to religion is its lack of religious language. Unlike many other public documents of its time period (the Declaration of Independence and various state constitutions, for example) the federal Constitution nowhere pays homage to the Supreme Being or even the importance of civic virtue. (Dreisbach 1996b, 928) Claiming that the lack of God in the Constitution “was no oversight,” Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore argue that it demonstrates a specific intent on the part of the Framers to create a “godless document” that would establish a purely secular republic. (Kramnick and Moore 1996, 27) The records of the Constitutional Convention provide scant support for such a thesis. According to extant accounts of the Convention, there was no debate about God in the Constitution’s Preamble, and it is risky to try to draw conclusions about intent based on

silence. When asked why members of the Convention did not include the customary invocation to God in the Preamble, Alexander Hamilton reportedly replied, “We forgot it.” (Adair and Harvey 1974, 147, n8)

Given the political context of the period, probably the best explanation that has been put forward about the lack of a reference to God in the Constitution relates to federalism, the belief that United States was actually a federation of smaller and largely autonomous republics. While the Constitution of 1787 sought to forge a stronger national union for certain limited national purposes, the fact remains that most people still regarded the state, not the nation, as the primary unit of political community under the new Constitution. Even George Washington, an ardent supporter of a stronger national government, wrote to his friend Marquis de Chastellux in 1788 about his hopes not for the new Republic but for “our rising Republics.” (Fitzpatrick 1931-1944, XXIX: 485) Accordingly, the Framers likely regarded state constitutions as the most appropriate place to invoke God and morality (and most came from states with constitutions that did just that). The Framers also may have been concerned about infringing on state prerogatives in this area. Given the lack of evidence during the debates at the Constitutional Convention, we will never know for sure.

The most explicit mention of religion in the unamended Constitution is the prohibition of religious tests for federal office. According to Article VI, “no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.” Religious tests were a standard feature in many of the existing state constitutions, and they typically denied atheists or non-Christians the right to hold public office. On the surface, this is perhaps the strongest evidence that the Framers sought to

separate religion from politics under the new Constitution. But in reality, the motivation behind the test ban is as unclear as the reason why God was left out of the Preamble. The records of the Constitutional Convention again shed little light on the matter. While certain delegates apparently disagreed with the test ban, the vote on the amendment proposing the ban was unanimous.(Farrand 1966, II: 461, 468)⁶ It would be wrong to conclude from the test ban that the Framers were necessarily opposed to a role for religion in politics—or even that they were indifferent to the religious beliefs of public officials. As Daniel Dreisbach points out, “some delegates at the Philadelphia Convention who endorsed the federal ban had previously participated in framing religious tests for their respective state constitutions.” (Dreisbach 1996c, 294) In addition, Christians of the time were divided over the usefulness of religious tests. Many believed that such laws violated the rights of conscience that ultimately protected Christians from persecution, and even some who wished to elect only Christians to public office thought that religious tests were next to useless and merely promoted hypocrisy. An unscrupulous politician, after all, would feign belief in certain doctrines whether he actually believed them or not.⁷ The principle of federalism also likely came into play. (Dreisbach 1996c, 294-295) Many churches feared granting the national government any power over religious beliefs lest the new government use that power to favor one group of churches over another. Again, however, we can not be certain about the reason for the adoption of the test ban given the limited data from the Convention itself.

In addition to the ban on religious tests, Article VI of the Constitution allowed public officials to declare their allegiance to the new Constitution “by Oath or Affirmation.” This was likely an effort to accommodate the views of Christian groups

such as Quakers that believed that swearing oaths was contrary to the Bible, based on Jesus's instructions in Matthew 5:33-37. The only other mentions of religion in the original Constitution were incidental. The clause dealing with the veto power of the President (Article I, Section 7) provides that the President shall have ten days to consider a bill for veto, "Sundays excepted." This paid deference to the traditional observance of Sunday as the sabbath by most Christian denominations. Finally, the Constitution dated itself both from the year of national independence and "in the Year of our Lord."⁸

Trying to construct an overall argument about the role of religion in the Constitution's text from these limited references is problematic. Perhaps the most one can say is that the Framers demonstrated a concern for religious liberty by enacting the ban on religious tests for public office and by allowing public officials to declare their support for the Constitution by affirmation instead of oath; and the Framers paid deference to the religious customs of the day through the Sundays exception clause.

Religion and the Theory of the Constitution

While religion may play a minor role in the actual text Constitution, that is not the case when it comes to its political theory. Though the intellectual influences that shaped American constitutionalism were many and diverse, it is beyond serious question that the Protestant tradition played a key role in shaping both the institutions and the ideas embodied by the Constitution of 1787.

Perhaps the most fundamental idea taken from the Protestant tradition was the idea of constitutionalism itself. God may not be mentioned in the Preamble, but the words "We the People... do ordain and establish this Constitution" resonate with echoes of

Puritan compact theory. The Puritans began as reformers within the Anglican Church in England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and a key group within Puritanism believed that local congregations ought to rule themselves by means of a voluntary compact among their members. (See McLaughlin 1932, chapters 1 and 2; Kelly and Harbison 1976, 14-19) This Puritan idea of compact as the source of communal authority in the church easily transferred to political institutions. Robert “Trouble-Church” Browne, an early leader of a Puritan faction known as the Separatists, argued that “an agreement of the people” was the correct foundation for civil government as well as church government. (McLaughlin 1932, 21) Hence, when Puritan Separatists on the Mayflower landed off of America in the early 1600s, they decided that they needed a compact in order to provide the proper basis for their new government. So 41 of the passengers signed what became known as the Mayflower Compact, declaring “solemnly and mutually in the Presence of God and one of another [that we] combine ourselves together into a civil Body Politick, for our better Ordering and Preservations, and Furtherance of the Ends aforesaid.” (Schultz, West, and Maclean 1999, 275)

Later compacts supplied the basis for governments at settlements in New Hampshire, Providence, Hartford, and along the Connecticut River. Perhaps the most significant of these documents were the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, which “for all practical purposes [were] the first of modern written constitutions,” pointed out Alfred Kelly and Winfred Harbison. “Like modern American constitutions, they were a written compact of the people by which a fundamental frame of government was erected.”(Kelly and Harbison 1976, 17)

Citizens of the Massachusetts Bay Colony did not explicitly form a compact for civil government (a compact of sorts already having been formed at the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Company). Nevertheless, the same ideas about government by compact permeated Massachusetts. Boston minister John Cotton declared that “all civill Relations are founded in Covenant... For... there is no other way whereby a people... free from naturall and compulsory engagements, can be united or combined together into one visible body to stand by mutuall Relations, fellow-members of the same body but only by mutual Covenant; as appeareth between husband and wife in the family, Magistrates and subjects in the Commonwealth, fellow-citizens in the same cities.” (McLaughlin 1932, 69) The pervasiveness of compact theory in Puritan New England supplied an important building block in the development of American constitutionalism, and its fullest expression was in the Constitution of 1787.

A second religious contribution to the Constitution concerned the view of human nature implicit in the document. Unlike later revolutionaries in France and Russia (and later American intellectuals such as Ralph Waldo Emerson), leaders of the American Revolution carried with them few illusions about human perfectibility. “If men were angels, no government would be necessary,” wrote James Madison in *Federalist* #51. (Rossiter 1963, 322) Madison’s implication, of course, was that men were far from angelic. That is why the Constitution created a government so limited by checks and balances. The Founders’ distrust of human nature had deep roots in the Christian emphasis on human sinfulness, which pervaded much of American colonial history, especially in Puritan New England. One cannot read the sermons of Puritan clergy without being confronted by the darker side of human nature and its implications for

limiting government power. In the words of the Rev. Cotton, it is a necessity “that all power... on earth be limited, Church-power or other... It is counted a matter of danger to the State to limit Prerogatives; but it is a further danger, not to have them limited...”

(Miller and Johnson 1963, I: 213) The Puritans’ realism about human nature cast a long shadow, and historian of religion Sydney Ahlstrom did not exaggerate when he suggested that “The *Federalist Papers*... as well as John Adams’s defenses of the American constitutions, can be read as Puritan contributions to Enlightenment political theory.” (Ahlstrom 1972, 363)

While the Christian tradition helped provide key aspects of the political theory embodied by the Constitution, it would be wrong to claim that the Founders somehow thought they were establishing a government explicitly derived from the teachings of the Bible, or even that they believed that “biblically revealed higher law offers the only reliable guide to personal and national health.” (Whitehead 1982, 190) While Christians throughout American history have advanced such claims about the Founders, there is little evidence to support them, and they show ignorance of the theory of knowledge prevalent at the time the Constitution was written.⁹ Both Christians and non-Christians among the Founders believed that reason and revelation taught the same truths when it came to earthly matters, and so there was little reason to draw a sharp distinction between the two. In the words of the Rev. John Witherspoon, James Madison’s old teacher at the College of New Jersey, “If the Scripture is true, the discoveries of reason cannot be contrary to it; and therefore, it has nothing to fear from that quarter.” (Witherspoon 1982, 64) Because of their view of the unity of truth, Christians among the Founding generation saw little need to try to explicitly derive a political system from the Bible.

There was nothing anti-religious in this view; indeed, it was grounded in the Christian natural law tradition articulated by a long line of Christian thinkers, including Augustine, Aquinas, Hooker, Calvin, and Luther.¹⁰ In the view of Christians during the American Founding, all truth came from God, and therefore all true ideas were open for use, whether they came from Christianity or were derived from antiquity and the Enlightenment, intellectual traditions from which the Founders borrowed liberally for such ideas as the separation of powers, bicameralism, and the extended republic. (Lutz 1984; Adair 1974; Pangle 1988; Barlow, Levy, and Masugi 1998)

If treating the Constitution as explicitly derived from the Bible is wrong, it is equally erroneous to regard the Constitution's political theory as somehow anti-religious as some scholars have alleged. Walter Berns, for example, argues that the Constitution is radically anti-Christian because it did not mandate government support for religion and because the Founders advocated religious freedom, a concept that Berns claims "derives from a non-religious source" that is "incompatible with Christian doctrine." (Berns 1986, 215) Berns' view is misguided for a variety of reasons. First, as pointed out earlier, the Constitution set up a federal system where most matters were left to the states and localities. Some delegates to the Constitutional Convention probably did favor government aid to churches, but they would have thought such aid should be determined by their own local communities, not the national government. A more fundamental problem with Berns' view is his claim that the Founders sought to undermine traditional religion because they believed in religious liberty. Berns is correct that the leading American statesmen of the time all embraced religious liberty, but he is wrong to think that the concept of religious liberty was somehow anti-Christian. While there were

influential Enlightenment theorists hostile to traditional Christianity who advocated religious freedom, the origins of the concept were largely within the Christian tradition itself. During the earliest days of Christianity, in fact, religious liberty was the standard doctrine among Christians. During the second century, church father Tertullian argued that “it is a fundamental human right, a privilege of nature, that every man should worship according to his own convictions: one man’s religion neither harms nor helps another man. It is assuredly no part of religion to compel religion.” (Tertullian 1998)

During the seventeenth century, the Christian case for religious liberty was made by American colonist Roger Williams. Starting out as a Puritan, Williams became a Baptist, and ended up a “Seeker.” He was indefatigable in his support for the rights of conscience, and he explicitly founded Providence, Rhode island as “a shelter for persons distressed for conscience.” Williams’ literary legacy includes *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution* (1644), where he pressed a vigorous case for religious toleration more than four decades before John Locke’s more celebrated *Letter on Toleration*. (Stokes and Pfeffer 1964, 13-16; Miller and Johnson 1963, I: 219-224) Williams condemned religious persecution squarely on Christian grounds, arguing that persecution contradicted the meek example of Jesus and promoted fraudulent conversions. In Williams’ view, the separation of church and state was good for the church because it helped safeguard its purity.

In America, the case for religious liberty was largely made by people arguing from the same vantage point as Williams. They advocated the rights of conscience in order to safeguard religion rather than restrict it. Often they sought to protect the rights of fellow believers. That was the idea that animated the Roman Catholic founders of Maryland, for instance. They wanted Maryland to serve as a haven for Catholics; in the process, they

created a colony that protected the liberties of Protestants as well. Quaker William Penn similarly envisioned his colony of Pennsylvania as a place where fellow believers could find refuge from the persecution they had suffered in England. The colony subsequently guaranteed complete freedom of worship for all who believed in “one Almighty God.” (Stokes and Pfeffer 1964, 11-13, 18-19). By the time the Constitution was written, the most numerous supporters of ending tax support for churches in America continued to be devout Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians rather than devotees of the French Enlightenment such as Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson.¹¹

Even if the Constitution is not explicitly anti-religious, some scholars claim that it is implicitly so because it downplays the political needfulness of religion. In ancient and medieval political philosophy, religion was regarded as a cornerstone of political life because it promoted cultural cohesion and civic morality. Framers such as James Madison, however, appeared to reject this traditional view of religion’s civic role. Far from relying on religion to promote cohesion and civic morality, Madison emphasized in Federalist #10 that “neither moral nor religious motives can be relied on as an adequate control” of the factional strife of politics. (Rossiter 1963, 81) Indeed, religion could help promote social disorder rather than contain it by inflaming the passions of citizens and breaking them into factions. According to Madison, the true solution to the “violence of faction” in politics was not religion or religiously-motivated morality, but structural checks and balances in the Constitution that could harness human selfishness in order to supply “the defect of better motives.” (Rossiter 1963, 322)

By separating the powers of government among different branches, the Framers set up a system where “ambition would be made to counter ambition,” and government

officials in one branch would find it in their interest to resist encroachments by officials of another branch. (Rossiter 1963, 322) In short, the government under the new Constitution appeared to be a machine that could run itself without the extraneous moral support traditionally supplied by religion. In the words of George Will, it was “almost as though the Founders thought they had devised a system so clever that it would work well even if no one had good motives — even if there was no public-spiritedness.” (Will 1983, 133)

Did the Framers really believe that they had fashioned a secular republic that could replace the need for religion and religiously-inspired moral convictions with checks and balances? Not really. It is true that defenders of the Constitution sometimes talked this way, but the Constitution was not written in a vacuum, and one needs to understand the broader political context. One of the chief complaints leveled against the new Constitution by its detractors was that it relied too much on the virtue of the new rulers for its proper operation. The dissenting members of Pennsylvania’s ratifying convention, for example, charged that in the new charter “it appears that the liberties, happiness, interests, and great concerns of the whole United States may be dependent upon the integrity, virtue, wisdom and knowledge of 25 or 26 men.” (Allen and Lloyd 1985, 62) During the Virginia Ratifying Convention, Patrick Henry similarly declared that “all the good qualities” of the proposed national government were founded on the “supposition that our American governors shall be honest.” But if the new rulers turned out to be “bad men,” he added, the new Constitution’s “defective and imperfect construction puts it in their power to perpetrate the worst of mischiefs....” (Allen and Lloyd 1985, 134) Finally, a writer using the nom de plume Cato warned readers of the *New York Journal* against

placing such an “unbounded” confidence in their rulers “as the advocates and framers of this new system advise....” (Allen and Lloyd 1985, 168)

Given these repeated warnings about the Constitution by its opponents, it became imperative for defenders of the new charter to emphasize its various safeguards rather than expound upon the role of religion and virtue in the new government. To emphasize the latter themes would have been to play into the hands of the Constitution’s detractors.

There was another reason that the architects of the Constitution likely de-emphasized the role of religion and morality that has been mentioned before: federalism. The institutions designed to promote virtue and character formation—churches, schools, and similar organizations—were based at the local level, and the states clearly wanted matters to remain that way. It made little sense to focus debate over the Constitution on institutions that everyone agreed the new government should have no authority to control.

Having said this, there is plenty of evidence that the Founding generation was acutely aware of the need for virtue among the citizenry to make their venture in self-government possible—and of the crucial role played by organized religion in cultivating this virtue. George Washington expressed the common sentiments of many Americans when he wrote in his Farewell Address that “of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports....” (Fitzpatrick 1931-1944, XXXV: 229) Far from believing that the Constitution was a machine that would run itself, the Founders knew that the citizens had to be self-controlled and honorable for free government to work. In the words of Benjamin Franklin, “Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters.” (Smyth 1905-1907, IX: 569) Countless clergymen of the

period sounded the same theme. Congregationalist minister Nathanael Emmons, for example, argued that “Vice, by destroying these moral and social ties, effectually saps the foundation of freedom, and completely prepares a people for the shackles of slavery. For nothing but the rod or arbitrary power is sufficient to restrain and govern a people, who have lost their virtue, and sunk into vice and corruption. Such a people are neither fit to enjoy, nor able to assert and maintain their liberties. They must be slaves.” (Ide 1842, II: 47)¹² Most Founders further agreed that the way this civic virtue was cultivated in society was largely through the nation’s churches. Secular education alone was not enough according to most of the Founding generation. Indeed, George Washington derided as a mere “supposition” the claim that “morality can be maintained without religion” because “Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, religion and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.” The upshot of all this was aptly summarized by Vice President John Adams in 1789: “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” (Howe 1966, 185)

So while the Constitution nowhere explicitly sanctioned a public role for religion, the logic of the republican system it set up required a *de facto* public role for religion. Religion was assigned the task of making citizens fit for republican government by inculcating civic morality. Indeed, some regarded the churches as taking on the function of the Roman *censor morum*, the public official in Rome who had the power of regulating the manners and morals of the people. The Rev. John Witherspoon made this point in his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* at Princeton: “In ancient times, in great states the censorial

power was found necessary to their continuance, which inspected the manners of men. It seems probable, that supporting the religious sects in modern times answers this end, for the particular discipline of each set, is intended for the correction of manners.” (Witherspoon 1982, 160-161)¹³ James Madison echoed Witherspoon’s view to a correspondent in 1823, reporting that in Virginia “[t]he settled opinion...is...that rival sects, with equal rights, exercise mutual censorships in favor of good morals....” (Hunt 1900-10, IX: 126-12) By regarding religion as the public defender of morality, the Founders opened the door for religion to become active in politics on issues involving what nineteenth century evangelist Lyman Beecher liked to call “great questions of national morality.” (Beecher 1824, 25) Admittedly, this was not something most of the Founders thought a great deal about, though some of them certainly foresaw it. John Adams during the Revolutionary War had called on ministers to “accommodate their discourses to the times, to preach against such sins as are most prevalent, and recommend such virtues as are most wanted.” (Taylor 1977- , II: 266) Nevertheless, the logic of the system created by the Founders virtually invited the churches to become the institutional defenders of justice and the moral law in politics, and for much of American history they have done precisely that. From Cherokee removal and slavery in the nineteenth century to abortion and civil rights today, religious groups have played a key—if controversial—role in American public life. At their best, they have sought to remind citizens that republicanism cannot rely on self-interest alone if it is to survive and flourish.

Religion and Controversies over the Constitution

Today the Constitution is revered by Americans with almost religious fervor. Indeed, some scholars have described devotion to the Constitution as America's civil religion. (Levinson 1992, 102-105) The view of the Constitution as an almost sacred text of American politics has been cultivated by American politicians from the early days of the republic. In 1792, James Madison even identified the Constitution as one of America's "political scriptures" that should be regarded by citizens "with a holy zeal." (Hunt 1900-10, VI: 85) For the most part, the religious community in America has embraced this view of the Constitution along with the rest of the culture. But there have been notable exceptions.

Religious controversy over the Constitution dates back to the ratification debates, when some opponents of the Constitution attacked the document's lack of a religious test for federal offices. This objection was raised during ratifying conventions in Virginia, Massachusetts, South Carolina, and North Carolina. (Bradley 1987, 74). In North Carolina (which voted against ratification of the Constitution), critics complained that Roman Catholics, Jews, Moslems, and pagans could be elected to federal office under the new Constitution. (Elliot 1836-59, IV: 192, 199, 215) James Iredell, a future Justice of the United States Supreme Court, responded that religious tests were an engine of religious persecution that violated the underpinnings of Christianity.

"The divine Author of our religion never wished for its support by worldly authority," said Iredell. "Has he not said that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it? It made much greater progress for itself, than when supported by the greatest authority upon earth." Iredell also argued that religious tests would not work because the irreligious would falsely swear to beliefs they did not share just so they could serve in office. He

further pointed out that people were left free to vote for whomever they wished under the new Constitution, and “it is never to be supposed that the people of America will trust their dearest rights to persons who have no religion at all, or a religion materially different from their own.” (Elliot 1836-59, IV: 192-94)

Similar exchanges took place during the Massachusetts ratifying convention. Interestingly, there the two clergymen who spoke on the issue both defended the ban on religious tests. Congregationalist minister Phillips Payson argued that “attempts to erect human tribunals for the consciences of men are impious encroachments upon the prerogatives of God. Upon these principles, had there been a religious test as a qualification for office, it would, in my opinion, have been a great blemish upon the instrument.” (Elliot 1836-59, II: 147) Baptist clergyman Isaac Backus concurred: “nothing is more evident, both in reason and the Holy Scriptures, than that religion is ever a matter between God and individuals; and, therefore, no man or men can impose any religious test, without invading the essential prerogatives of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Elliot 1836-59, II: 148)

Religious supporters of the Constitution seemed convinced that, if anything, the new Constitution was designed to promote the glory of God. Some turned tables on critics by questioning whether the critics were really Christians. In the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, for example, a “minister of the Gospel... beg[ged] leave to ask, whether men can be serious in regard to the Christian religion, who object to a government that is calculated to promote the glory of God, by establishing peace, order and justice in our country?” (Jensen 1976-90, III: 186)

During the mid-1800s, religious controversy over the Constitution resurfaced with a vengeance concerning the issue of slavery. Most members of the abolitionist movement were animated at least in part by deep religious convictions, and many were active church members. As abolitionism spread and slavery continued to prosper, many of them wondered whether they could defend a document that legally protected slavery where it existed. Firebrand William Lloyd Garrison publicly burned a copy of the Constitution at a mass meeting in 1854 after savaging it as “an agreement with hell.” Upon lighting the document, he cried: “And let the people say Amen.” (Noonan 1987, 175) American Christians opposed to slavery struggled with whether to embrace Garrison’s view or find a way to defend the Constitution as anti-slavery. African-American Frederick Douglass, active in the African Methodist church, first sided with Garrison, but he eventually came to see that the principles of equality and self-government underlying the Constitution actually made it an anti-slavery document. “Interpreted as it ought to be interpreted,” said Douglass, “the Constitution is a glorious liberty document.” (Foner 1950, II: 202)¹⁴

The 1800s also saw the revival of concern over the Constitution’s lack of a reference to God, and a political movement eventually developed to amend the Constitution to officially recognize the authority of Jesus Christ. The inspiration for this crusade derived in large part from groups within the Reformed Presbyterian theological tradition that had decided it was immoral to vote in national elections until the Constitution recognized Christ. (Hays 1892, 420-21; Stokes and Pfeffer 1964, 565-566) The movement was spearheaded by the National Reform Association, which was founded in 1863. “This country was settled by Christian men with Christian ends in view,” wrote the Rev. J. M. Foster, an official of the group. “But, strange to say, in setting up this

government they ignored the claims of the King of kings. Our Constitution does not contain the name of God. It is silent as the grave respecting the authority and law of the reigning Mediator... Morally, it is a compact of political atheism.” (Foster 1890, 234) Proposals for a “Christian Amendment” to the Constitution continued into the twentieth century, with Senator Ralph Flanders of Vermont submitting to Congress in 1953 an amendment that would have the Constitution declare: “This Nation devoutly recognizes the authority and law of Jesus Christ, Saviour and Ruler of Nations through whom are bestowed the blessings of Almighty God.” (Stokes and Pfeffer 1964, 567) Like previous proposals, this one went nowhere.

Despite these intermittent controversies implicating the Constitution, the more usual response of religious people to the nation’s founding document has been unqualified support. Given the successful history of the Constitution in action, this fact should come as little surprise. By crafting a document that took seriously the fallibility of human nature, the Founders created a government that has withstood the political passions that have destroyed so many other regimes throughout human history. By refusing to sanction even the hint of an official state religion in their new Constitution, the Founders encouraged the conditions necessary for religion to flourish free from government regulation. Finally, by recognizing the need for civic virtue in order to make their constitutional system work in practice, the Founders opened the door for religion to act as a vibrant moral force in American public life.

ENDNOTES

¹ The *National Intelligencer* account garbled other facts as well. The compromise proposal for equal state representation in the Senate came about well after Franklin's speech, and the adjournment referred to took place at a different time altogether and was not proposed by Franklin.

² For other nineteenth-century advocates of this view, see Frelinghuysen 1838; McMaster 1832; Baird 1856, 240-261.

³ Also see Marshall and Manuel 1977 and 1986.

⁴ Even in some evangelical pulpits Washington's orthodoxy came under suspicion; in Albany, Episcopal divine Bird Wilson lamented that Washington "was a great and good man, but he was not a professor of religion." (Boller 1963, 15).

⁵ For a discussion of Wilson's theory of law and its relationship to religion, see West 1996, 41-45; Hall 1997, 35-67. Concerning Wilson's religious beliefs, Bradford claims that Wilson "was more a Deist than a Christian of any sort," but as Hall points out, there seems to be no evidence for this assertion. (Bradford 1982, 83; Hall 1997, 33)

⁶ Although the amendment on religious tests received a unanimous vote at the Convention, the final vote on the section of the Constitution in which the test ban appears only passed 8-1 with two states divided.

⁷ See discussion of the ratification debates below.

⁸ For an interesting discussion of these clauses and their interpretation by Americans in the nineteenth century, see Dreisbach 1996b, 965-967, 974-986.

⁹ For attempts to trace the roots of the Constitution back to the Bible, see Beecher 1852, I: 176-90; Barton 1995.

¹⁰ For a good introduction to the Christian natural law tradition, see Budziszewski 1997 and Cromartie 1997.

¹¹ Evangelical support for the separation between church and state could be clearly seen in the debate over ending tax support of churches in Virginia. (Buckley 1977; Levy 1986, 55-58; Curry 1986, 143-146.)

¹² For similar arguments, see Mason 1849, II: 59-60; Kendal 1804, II: 1241-1263; Cooke 1825, 13; Bouton 1828, 24-27; Dana 1823, 17-18; Lord 1831; Beecher 1852, II: 79-80, 99-101; Wayland 1963, 320-321.

¹³ Also see “A Pastoral Letter from the Synod of New York and Philadelphia,” which was drafted by Witherspoon. (Witherspoon 1802, III: 14)

¹⁴ The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. would make a similar argument a century later, calling the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, “those great wells of democracy dug deep by the Founding Fathers.” (King 1991, 302)

REFERENCES

Adair, Douglass and Marvin Harvey. 1974. “Was Alexander Hamilton a Christian Statesman?” in *Fame and the Founding Fathers*, edited by Trevor Colbourn. New York: W.W. Norton. 141-159.

Adair, Douglass. 1974. “‘That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science’ David Hume, James Madison, and the Tenth Federalist” and “‘Experience Must Be Our Only Guide’: History, Democratic Theory, and the United States Constitution” in *Fame and the Founding Fathers*, edited by Trevor Colbourn. New York: W.W. Norton. 93-123.

Ahlstrom, Sydney. 1972. *A Religious History of the American People*. New Haven: Yale

University Press.

Allen, W. B. and Gordon Lloyd. 1985. *The Essential Antifederalist*. New York: University Press of America.

Amos, Gary and Richard Gardiner. 1998. *Never Before in History: America's Inspired Birth*. Dallas: Haughton Publishing Co.

Baird, Robert. 1856. *Religion in America*. New York: Harper and Brothers.

Barlow, J. Jackson, Leonard W. Levy, and Ken Masugi. 1988. *The American Founding: Essays on the Formation of the Constitution*. New York: Greenwood Press.

Barton, David. 1995. *America's Godly Heritage*. WallBuilders, Inc., distributed by Vision Video, Worcester, PA.

Beecher, Lyman. 1824. *The Faith Once Delivered to the Saints*, second edition. Boston: Crocker and Brewster.

Beecher, Lyman. 1852. *Works of Lyman Beecher*. Boston: Jewett.

Berns, Walter. 1986. "Religion and the Founding Principle," in Robert Horwitz, editor, *The Moral Foundations of the American Republic*, third edition. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia. 204-229.

Boller, Paul F. 1963. *George Washington and Religion*. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press.

Bouton, Nathaniel. 1828. *The Responsibilities of Rulers*. Concord: Henry F. Moore.

Bradford, M.E. 1982. *A Worthy Company: Brief Lives of the Framers of the United States Constitution*. Marlborough, New Hamp.: Plymouth Rock Foundation.

- Bradley, Gerard V. 1987. *Church-State Relationships in America*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Buckley, Thomas. 1977. *Church and State in Revolutionary Virginia, 1776-1787*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Budziszewski, J. 1997. *Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press.
- Carman. 1998. "America Again" in *Carman: Absolute Best Videos*. Brentwood, Tenn.: Sparrow Communications Group.
- Cooke, Phinehas. 1825. *Reciprocal Obligations of Religion and Civil Government*. Concord: Jacob B. Moore.
- Cousins, Norman, editor. 1958. *"In God We Trust": The Religious Beliefs and Ideas of the American Founding Fathers*. New York: Harper and Brothers.
- Cromartie, Michael, editor. 1997. *A Preserving Grace: Protestants, Catholics, and Natural Law*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Curry, Thomas. 1986. *The First Freedomss: Church and State in America to the Passage of the First Amendment*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- D'Arusmont, Frances Wright. 1972. *Life, Letters and Lectures, 1834-1844*. New York: Arno Press.
- Dana, Daniel. 1823. *An Election Sermon*. Concord: J.B. Moore.
- Dreisbach, Daniel, editor. 1996a. *Religion and Politics in the Early Republic: Jaspas Adams and the Church-State Debate*. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky.

- Dreisbach, Daniel. 1996b. "In Search of a Christian Commonwealth: An Examination of Selected Nineteenth-Century Commentaries on References to God and the Christian Religion in the United States Constitution." *Baylor Law Review* 48 (Fall 1996): 927-1000.
- Dreisbach, Daniel. 1996c. "The Constitution's Forgotten Religion Clause: Reflections on the Article VI Religious Test Ban." *Journal of Church and State*. 38 (Spring 1996): 261-295.
- Eidsmoe, John. 1987. *Christianity and the Constitution: The Faith of Our Founding Fathers*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Elliot, Jonathan, editor, 1836-59. *The debates in the several state conventions on the adoption of the federal Constitution, as recommended by the General Convention at Philadelphia in 1787*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co.
- Farrand, Max, editor. 1966. *Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, rev. ed. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Fitzpatrick, John, editor. 1931-44. *Writings of George Washington*. Washington: U.S. George Washington Bicentennial Commission.
- Foner, Philip, editor, 1950. *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*. New York: International Publishers, 1950.
- Foster, J.M. 1890. *Reformation Principles, State and Applied*. Chicago: Fleming H. Revell.
- Frelinghuysen, Theodore [?]. 1838. *An Inquiry into the Moral and Religious Character of the American Government*. New York: Wiley and Putnam.

- Gaustad, Edwin. 1987. *Faith of Our Fathers: Religion and the New Nation*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.
- Grimké, Thomas S. 1833. *Oration on the Principal Duties of Americans*. Charleston: William Estill.
- Hall, Mark David. 1997. *The Political and Legal Philosophy of James Wilson, 1742-1798*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.
- Hays, George P. 1892. *Presbyterians*. New York: Hill.
- Howe, Jr., John R. 1966. *The Changing Political Thought of John Adams*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Hunt, Gaillard, editor. 1900-10. *Writings of James Madison*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Hutchinson, William T. and William M. Frachal , editors. 1962- . *Papers of James Madison*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ide, Jacob, editor. 1842. *Works of Nathanael Emmons*. Boston: Crocker and Brewster.
- Jensen, Merrill, editor. 1976-90. *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
- Johnson, Richard. 1834. Report of Mr. Johnson (March 4-5) in *American State Papers*, Class VII: Post Office Department. Washington,D.C.: Gales and Seaton. I: 229-231.
- Johnson, William J. 1919. *George Washington the Christian*. New York: Abingdon Press.
- Kelly, Alfred and Winfred Harbison. 1976. *The American Constitution: Its Origins and Development*. 5th edition. New York: W.W. Norton.

- Kendal, Samuel. 1804. "Religion the Only Sure Basis of Free Government" in *American Political Writing during the Founding Era, 1760-1805*. Charles S. Hyneman and Donald S. Lutz, editors. Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1983. II: 1241-1263.
- King, Jr., Martin Luther. 1991. "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James Melvin Washington. San Francisco: Harper.
- Kramnick, Isaac and R. Laurence Moore. 1996. *The Godless Constitution: The Case Against Religious Correctness*. New York: Norton.
- LaHaye, Tim. 1987. *Faith of Our Founding Fathers*. Brentwood, Tenn.: Wolgemuth and Hyatt.
- Levinson, Sanford. 1992. "Constitution as Civil Religion," in Leonard W. Levy, Kenneth Karst, and John G. West, Jr., editors, *The Encyclopedia of the American Constitution, Supplement I*. New York: Macmillan.
- Levy, Leonard W. 1986. *The Establishment Clause: Religion and the First Amendment*. New York: Macmillan.
- Lord, Nathan. 1831. *A Sermon Preached at the Annual Election*. Concord: Hill and Barton.
- Lumpkin, Wilson. 1907. *The Removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia*. New York: Dodd, Mead.
- Lutz, Donald S. 1984. "The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth Century American Political Thought." *American Political Science Review* 189: 189-97.

M'Guire, E.C. 1836. *The Religious Opinions and Character of Washington*. New York:
Harper and Brothers.

Madison, James. 1987. *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787*. New York:
W.W. Norton Company.

Marshall, Peter and David Manuel. 1977. *The Light and the Glory*. Old Tappan, NJ:
Fleming H. Revell.

Marshall, Peter and David Manuel. 1986. *From Sea to Shining Sea*. Old Tappan, NJ:
Fleming H. Revell, 1986.

Mason, Ebenezer, editor. 1849. *Complete Works of John Mason*. New York: Baker and
Scribner.

McCloskey, Robert Green, editor. 1967. *The Works of James Wilson*. Cambridge, Mass.:
Belknap Press.

McLaughlin, Andrew. 1932. *Foundations of American Constitutionalism*. New York:
New York University Press.

McMaster, Gilbert. 1832. *The Moral Character of Civil Government, Considered with
Reference to the Political Institutions of the United States*. Albany: W.C. Little.

Miller, John C. 1960. *The Federalists, 1789-1801*. New York: Harper and Row.

Miller, Perry and Thomas Johnson, editors. 1963. *The Puritans: A Sourcebook of their
Writings*. Revised edition. New York: Harper Torchbooks.

Noonan, John T. 1987. *The Believer and the Powers that Are*. New York: Macmillan.

- Pangle, Thomas. 1988. *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rossiter, Clinton. 1963. *The Federalist Papers*. New York: New American Library.
- Schaeffer, Francis A. 1981. *A Christian Manifesto*. Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books.
- Schultz, Jeffrey D., John G. West, Jr. and Iain Maclean, editors. 1999. *The Encyclopedia of Religion in American Politics*. Phoenix: Oryx Press.
- Smyth, Albert Henry, editor. 1905-07. *Writings of Benjamin Franklin*. New York: Macmillan.
- Stokes, Anson Phelps and Leo Pfeffer. 1964. *Church and State in the United States*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood.
- Taylor, Robert. 1977- . *Papers of John Adams*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press
- Tertullian. 1998. "To Scapula," §2 in *Master Christian Library* [CD-Rom], version 6. Albany, Oregon: Ages Software.
- Wayland, Francis. 1963. *The Elements of Moral Science*. Joseph L. Blau, editor. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- West, John G. 1996. *The Politics of Revelation and Reason*. Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas.
- Whitehead, John W. 1982. *The Second American Revolution*. Elgin, Illinois: David C. Cook Publishing Co.
- Will, George. 1983. *Statecraft as Soulcraft*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Witherspoon, John. 1982. *Annotated Edition of Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, edited by Jack Scott. Newark: University of Delaware Press.

Witherspoon, John. 1802. *The Works of Rev. John Witherspoon*. 2d edition, rev. and corrected. Philadelphia: W. Woodward.

Wood, Gordon. 1980. "Evangelical America and Early Mormonism." *New York History*. 61 (October 1980): 359-386.

Zahniser, Marvin R. 1967. *Charles Cotesworth Pickney: Founding Father*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.

¹ The *National Intelligencer* account garbled other facts as well. The compromise proposal for equal state representation in the Senate came about well after Franklin's speech, and the adjournment referred to took place at a different time altogether and was not proposed by Franklin.

² For other nineteenth-century advocates of this view, see Frelinghuysen 1838; McMaster 1832; Baird 1856, 240-261.

³ Also see Marshall and Manuel 1977 and 1986.

⁴ Even in some evangelical pulpits Washington's orthodoxy came under suspicion; in Albany, Episcopal divine Bird Wilson lamented that Washington "was a great and good man, but he was not a professor of religion." (Boller 1963, 15).

⁵ For a discussion of Wilson's theory of law and its relationship to religion, see West 1996, 41-45; Hall 1997, 35-67. Concerning Wilson's religious beliefs, Bradford claims that Wilson "was more a Deist than a Christian of any sort," but as Hall points out, there seems to be no evidence for this assertion. (Bradford 1982, 83; Hall 1997, 33)

⁶ Although the amendment on religious tests received a unanimous vote at the Convention, the final vote on the section of the Constitution in which the test ban appears only passed 8-1 with two states divided.

⁷ See discussion of the ratification debates below.

⁸ For an interesting discussion of these clauses and their interpretation by Americans in the nineteenth century, see Dreisbach 1996b, 965-967, 974-986.

⁹ For attempts to trace the roots of the Constitution back to the Bible, see Beecher 1852, I: 176-90; Barton 1995.

¹⁰ For a good introduction to the Christian natural law tradition, see Budziszewski 1997 and Cromartie 1997.

¹¹ Evangelical support for the separation between church and state could be clearly seen in the debate over ending tax support of churches in Virginia. (Buckley 1977; Levy 1986, 55-58; Curry 1986, 143-146.)

¹² For similar arguments, see Mason 1849, II: 59-60; Madison, Bishop James 1795, 1319-1320; Moore 1802, II: 1212-1213; Kendal 1804, II: 1241-1263; Bouton 1825, 6; Cooke 1825, 13; Bouton 1828, 24-27; Dana 1823, 17-18; Lord 1831; Beecher 1852, II: 79-80, 99-101; Wayland 1863, 320-321.

¹³ Also see “A Pastoral Letter from the Synod of New York and Philadelphia,” which was drafted by Witherspoon. (Witherspoon 1802, III: 14)

¹⁴ The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. would make a similar argument a century later, calling the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, “those great wells of democracy dug deep by the Founding Fathers.” King 1991, 302.