

Christian in Culture, Secular in Structure: Reframing America's Founding

A Historical Rebuttal to Christian Nationalist Claims
As Seen in the Commentary of Charlie Kirk & PragerU

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Published by:

The Arrogant Independent

Civic Literacy | Constitutional Integrity | Pluralist Patriotism

Date:

October 2025

"Truth can stand by itself. It is error alone which needs the support of government."
— Thomas Jefferson (1786)

Section I: Introduction — A Nation in Debate

Across town halls, churches, podcasts, and viral videos, a growing narrative claims that America was founded as a Christian nation. Proponents such as Charlie Kirk and organizations like PragerU argue that America's moral and constitutional decay stems from its rejection of Christianity as a legal and cultural foundation (Kirk, 2023). They assert that biblical law and Protestant belief were not only guiding principles for individual founders, but also the structural basis for American governance.

This belief resonates with many Americans who feel the erosion of shared moral values and long for a return to spiritual grounding. It appeals to nostalgia, patriotism, and a yearning for national purpose. And it is true that many Founders were personally religious, with Christianity deeply woven into early American culture (Noll, 2002).

However, the claim that the United States was designed as a Christian theocracy—or even that it enshrined Christian doctrine into its founding documents—does not withstand scrutiny. While Christianity influenced the personal lives of many early leaders, the structure of the U.S. Constitution was deliberately secular, crafted to prevent religious establishment and protect the rights of all faiths—and of none (Dreisbach, 2002; Madison, 1785/2006).

If we ignore this distinction, we risk misinterpreting our past and undermining the very freedoms the Founders sought to protect. In fact, the strength of religious liberty in America—the ability to worship freely, or not at all—rests on the secular foundation they built.

This report does not deny the role of Christianity in the lives of the Founders or the culture of the time. Instead, it explores the truth about the Founding Era: that a Christian people built a religiously neutral government, rooted in Enlightenment ideals, classical legal traditions, and a profound belief in liberty of conscience (Holmes, 2006; Lutz, 1984). We will engage the arguments put forward by Kirk and others, examine their historical foundations, and offer a balanced, evidence-based rebuttal—one that affirms religious belief but defends constitutional clarity.

Section II: Faith and the Founders — What They Really Believed

One of the most persistent misunderstandings about the Founding Era is that the Founders shared a unified Christian worldview and intended to embed Christianity into the fabric of American law. While it is true that Christianity was the dominant religion of the colonial and post-revolutionary period, the personal beliefs of the Founders were more diverse than often portrayed—and their public design for government was deliberately inclusive and nonsectarian (Holmes, 2006; Dreisbach, 2002).

The Founders Were Religious — But Not Theocratic

Many Founders were practicing Christians, particularly within the Protestant tradition. Others were Deists, believing in a Creator but rejecting organized religion and divine revelation. Still others held complex, evolving views that defied easy categorization.

For example:

- **George Washington** frequently referenced Providence and attended Anglican services, but avoided communion and rarely invoked Christ by name. His personal letters reflect a general theistic morality, not doctrinal orthodoxy (Holmes, 2006).
- **Thomas Jefferson**, author of the Declaration of Independence, rejected the divinity of Christ, opposed clerical influence in government, and edited his own version of the New Testament, removing miracles and supernatural references (Dreisbach, 2002; Jefferson, 1820/1904).
- **John Adams** called himself a Christian but criticized the Trinity, eternal damnation, and institutional dogma, writing that “this would be the best of all possible worlds if there were no religion in it”—if by “religion” one meant corruption and superstition (Holmes, 2006).
- **Benjamin Franklin**, though raised Presbyterian, was a philosophical Deist who doubted revelation and emphasized practical morality. Yet even he believed religion could be useful for public virtue and social order (Noll, 2002).

Thus, while Christian influence was widespread, it did not translate into a shared theological agenda. The Founders were a coalition of Enlightenment thinkers, moderate Christians, Deists, and skeptics—united not by doctrine but by a common goal of building a republic where religious freedom could flourish.

Religion Was Meant to Be Voluntary, Not Legislated

The Founders repeatedly warned against the dangers of religious coercion and the mingling of church and state. James Madison, principal architect of the Constitution and Bill of Rights, argued:

“The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man... It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage and such only as he believes to be acceptable to him.”

— *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments* (Madison, 1785/2006)

This foundational text argued forcefully against taxpayer-funded clergy and state-mandated religious belief. Madison, like many other Framers, believed that true faith must be chosen freely, and that civil government had no role in compelling worship.

Even George Washington, in his letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, affirmed the right of all citizens—*“of every nation and tongue”*—to dwell safely and freely in the United States:

“For happily the Government of the United States... gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.” (Washington, 1790)

A Christian Moral Culture, But a Secular Legal Framework

What united the Founders was not a theological vision for America, but a moral and civic philosophy. They believed that virtue, character, and self-restraint were essential to liberty—but that these qualities should emerge from personal belief, not government coercion (Kramnick & Moore, 1996).

To suggest that they intended to write Christianity into law ignores their deliberate choice to keep religion and government separate. Even in the face of strong religious majorities, they designed a framework of pluralism that was revolutionary for its time.

Section III: The Declaration of Independence — Vague Deity or Christian God?

A central argument in Charlie Kirk’s claim that America was founded as a Christian nation hinges on the references to God in the *Declaration of Independence*. He asserts that the Declaration is, in essence, a prayer to Jesus Christ, and that the Founders were appealing to Christian theology as the basis for rights and governance (Kirk, 2023).

While the Declaration does reference a divine presence four times, a careful textual and historical analysis shows that these references reflect a Deist and Enlightenment-influenced understanding of God, not a specific Christian theology. In fact, the authors of the Declaration intentionally used vague, philosophical language to avoid religious sectarianism and unify the colonies under a shared moral cause, not a shared religion.

Four Mentions of “God” in the Declaration

Here are the references in the *Declaration of Independence*:

1. **“Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God”**
2. **“Endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights”**
3. **“Appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions”**
4. **“With a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence”**

What do these mean?

- **“Nature’s God”** is a phrase rooted in **Deism** and **natural law philosophy**, especially through the writings of **John Locke** and **Enlightenment thinkers** like Montesquieu and

Rousseau (Lutz, 1984; Holmes, 2006). It refers to a **non-denominational divine force** that can be understood through reason and observation—not through biblical revelation or church doctrine.

- The “**Creator**” is likewise undefined. The term appeals to a broad belief in **natural rights**, which were thought to be **inherent to human beings**, not granted by governments. This was a **strategic political move**, not a theological assertion (Banning, 1995).
- “**Supreme Judge of the world**” and “**Divine Providence**” evoke traditional language, but again, the terms are **non-specific** and reflect a belief in **moral accountability**, not a doctrine of salvation through Christ.

As scholar Daniel Dreisbach notes, the Declaration’s authors employed **religious language that was “broadly theistic” but “carefully chosen to avoid doctrinal specificity”** (Dreisbach, 2002, p. 21).

Thomas Jefferson’s Intent: A Universal Moral Document

The primary author of the Declaration, Thomas Jefferson, was not a Christian in the orthodox sense. He denied the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus, and the inspiration of the Bible. His writings show he was attempting to appeal to universal truths, not sectarian faith:

“The care of every man’s soul belongs to himself... It is time enough for the rightful purposes of civil government for its officers to interfere when principles break out into overt acts against peace and good order.”

— *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom* (Jefferson, 1786)

Jefferson’s vision of religious liberty was expansive and pluralistic. He understood that religious references in public documents needed to be inclusive enough to unite Anglicans, Puritans, Quakers, Catholics, Deists, and even skeptics—many of whom made up the revolutionary movement.

A Strategic Document, Not a Theological Creed

It’s important to remember that the Declaration of Independence is not a governing document. It was a rhetorical and philosophical argument justifying separation from Britain. It does not establish law, government structure, or religious requirements. That was left to the U.S. Constitution, written more than a decade later—and which, notably, contains no reference to God or Christianity at all.

Thus, interpreting the Declaration as a Christian prayer misrepresents its intent. It was designed to unify people of varying faiths, not to enshrine any one religion.

Summary Judgment

Claim	Historical Reality
The Declaration is a prayer to Jesus Christ	The Declaration uses Deist language to refer to a general Creator
References to “God” mean Christian theology	The terms are non-sectarian and consistent with Enlightenment Deism
It proves the U.S. was founded as a Christian nation	It proves the U.S. was founded on natural rights philosophy , not biblical law

In truth, the Declaration affirms a higher moral order—but it leaves the identity of the divine deliberately vague. This was a feature, not a flaw: it allowed people of all beliefs to rally behind liberty.

Section IV: The Constitution — Designed for Liberty, Not Theology

While the *Declaration of Independence* makes abstract references to a Creator, the United States Constitution is intentionally silent on religion—a fact that speaks volumes about the Founders’ vision for public life. Despite being drafted by many deeply moral and religious men, the Constitution contains no mention of God, Jesus Christ, the Bible, or Christianity. This omission was not an oversight. It was a deliberate decision to build a government that protected religion, rather than enforced it (Dreisbach, 2002; Kramnick & Moore, 1996).

In contrast to the common claims made by Christian nationalists like Charlie Kirk—that America’s crisis stems from losing its “Christian government”—the actual document that created the federal government was built to preserve freedom of conscience for all, without religious tests or state church authority (Kirk, 2023).

A Godless Document by Design

Nowhere in the U.S. Constitution are religious beliefs required, endorsed, or elevated above others. In fact, the only mention of religion in the body of the Constitution is found in Article VI, Clause 3:

“...no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.”

This radical clause marked a dramatic departure from the practices of most European nations at the time—and even many American colonies—where religious tests were common requirements for public service (Dreisbach, 2002).

Later, the First Amendment, ratified in 1791, further entrenched this neutrality:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...”

The Establishment Clause and Free Exercise Clause together guaranteed that no national church would be created, and that individuals could freely practice (or not practice) any faith without interference.

James Madison’s Principle of Separation

James Madison, known as the “Father of the Constitution,” was clear in his belief that religion and government should remain separate. In a 1785 document opposing a Virginia bill to support Christian teachers, Madison wrote:

“Religion is wholly exempt from the cognizance of civil authority.”
— *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments* (Madison, 1785/2006)

Madison, a devout yet rationalist thinker, saw the dangers of religious establishments from European history and sought to build a government based on civic virtue, not clerical dominance (Banning, 1995).

Treaty of Tripoli: Congressional Confirmation of Secularism

Perhaps the clearest evidence of the Founders’ intent to establish a secular government is found in the Treaty of Tripoli (1797)—a formal agreement between the United States and a Muslim nation. Article 11 of the treaty, drafted under President George Washington and ratified under President John Adams, states:

“The Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.”

This clause was passed unanimously by the U.S. Senate, then composed of many Founders and Revolutionary War veterans. There was no controversy or objection to the statement at the time, because it was understood to reflect the reality: that while many Americans were Christian, the government itself was not tied to any religion (Leibowitz, 1995).

Misinterpretation of Silence as Omission

Christian nationalists often argue that the Constitution’s silence on religion is proof of decline or spiritual compromise. But this misunderstands the purpose of government in the eyes of the Framers. The Constitution does not impose beliefs—it sets up a structure for liberty, in which faith is preserved by being kept private.

This model has allowed Christianity to flourish in America far more than in countries with established state churches. As scholars Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore note:

“What has been good for religion in America has been precisely the absence of its formal ties to the state.” (Kramnick & Moore, 1996, p. 29)

Summary Judgment

Claim	Historical Reality
The Constitution is Christian	The Constitution contains no religious language and bans religious tests
Christianity is the legal foundation	Secular Enlightenment principles informed the legal structure
Religion was removed over time	The Founders intentionally omitted it from federal law to preserve freedom

The Constitution was never a Christian document. It was a revolutionary statement of secular government designed to protect religious freedom for all.

Section V: State Constitutions and Religious Tests — A Historical Artifact

Charlie Kirk and others often point out that many of the original 13 states had constitutions requiring belief in Christianity—sometimes even Protestantism—as a qualification for holding public office. At the time of the American founding, 9 out of 13 states had religious tests for civil service, and all 13 made some form of religious reference in their legal codes (Dreisbach, 2002).

This fact is historically accurate, but it does not support the claim that the United States as a nation was founded on Christianity. Rather, it reflects the transitional nature of early America: a group of former colonies with deeply religious populations, but now unified under a new federal Constitution that deliberately excluded religious tests (Kramnick & Moore, 1996).

Understanding this evolution is key. Early state-level theocracy was real—but it was neither endorsed nor preserved in the federal design, and over time, it was struck down through the courts and abandoned by law.

State Religious Tests Were Local, Not National

After independence, states retained authority to structure their own governments. Many of them adopted constitutions that:

- Required **Protestant faith** or a declaration of Christian belief
- Barred **Catholics, Jews, or nonbelievers** from holding office
- Incorporated **biblical references or moral codes**

For example:

- **Massachusetts (1780)** required officials to “declare their belief in the Christian religion.”
- **North Carolina (1776)** allowed only Protestants to hold office.
- **Maryland (1776)** permitted only Christians—but notably, **Catholics were included**, which was rare at the time (Dreisbach, 2002).

These religious tests reflected colonial traditions rooted in English law and Puritan culture—not the principles of the newly formed federal government.

The U.S. Constitution Rejected This Model

While states initially carried forward old religious assumptions, the **U.S. Constitution took a radical new direction**. Article VI clearly states:

“...no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.”

This clause **broke with centuries of European precedent**, where religious uniformity was the foundation of political loyalty. The Founders recognized that liberty of conscience—including **the right to hold public office regardless of religion**—was essential to a functioning pluralistic democracy (Holmes, 2006).

As legal scholar Leonard Levy notes, “The ban on religious tests in the federal Constitution was unprecedented and momentous—it marked the legal birth of religious equality” (Levy, 1994, p. 89).

The Courts Dismantled State Religious Tests

While religious requirements remained at the state level into the 19th and even early 20th century, the tide turned as federal principles of liberty were applied to the states through the 14th Amendment and judicial interpretation.

The landmark case was:

Torcaso v. Watkins

(1961)

- Issue: Maryland required a declaration of belief in God to hold public office.
- Ruling: The U.S. Supreme Court struck down the requirement, declaring it a violation of the First and Fourteenth Amendments.

- Opinion: “Neither a state nor the federal government can constitutionally force a person to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion.” (*Torcaso v. Watkins*, 367 U.S. 488, 1961)

This case built upon earlier decisions such as:

- *Cantwell v. Connecticut* (1940)
- *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947)

...all of which reaffirmed the **constitutional wall between church and state**, especially in matters of law and public service.

Historical Trajectory: From Sectarianism to Liberty

The story of America’s religious development is not one of Christian permanence—but of **Christian plurality giving way to legal neutrality**. The early religious character of the states was acknowledged, but the federal Constitution charted a **forward-looking path**, rooted in Enlightenment ideals of personal liberty and civic inclusion (Banning, 1995).

Key point: America didn’t erase Christianity—it simply refused to **codify it into law** at the national level.

Summary Judgment

Claim	Historical Reality
All original states required Christianity	Many did—but the federal government rejected this model
Religious tests were the norm	True for states—but banned at the national level in 1787
These tests prove America was founded on Christianity	They prove religious culture existed , not religious governance
Today’s secularism is a modern distortion	It is the legal evolution of the Founders’ federal vision

State-level Christian laws were real—but the Constitution set a different course. The Founders planted the seeds of religious freedom, and the courts helped it grow.

Section VI: Common Law and the Bible — Misleading Connections

A core argument made by Christian nationalists like Charlie Kirk is that American law—especially common law—is fundamentally derived from the Bible. This claim often rests on the writings of English jurist William Blackstone, whose *Commentaries on the Laws of*

England were widely read by the Founders. Kirk and others suggest that because Blackstone was a Christian and cited Scripture, our legal system is therefore biblical in origin (Kirk, 2023).

This argument confuses moral influence with legal structure. While Christianity influenced the moral worldview of many early Americans—including Blackstone himself—the actual foundations of American common law are broader and more diverse, drawing from Roman law, Enlightenment philosophy, and centuries of English legal development, in addition to moral norms informed by Christian thought (Levy, 1994; Berman, 1983).

What Is Common Law?

Common law refers to a legal system based on precedent—court decisions accumulated over time, forming a body of law that guides future rulings. It originated in medieval England, shaped over centuries by evolving judicial interpretations rather than by any one religious text.

Key features of common law include:

- **Presumption of innocence**
- **Trial by jury**
- **Due process**
- **Protection of property and contracts**

These principles were rooted in secular legal reasoning, not Scripture. In fact, many of them predate Christianity, emerging from Greco-Roman law and medieval English courts (Berman, 1983; Kramnick & Moore, 1996).

Blackstone's Influence — More Complex Than Claimed

William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–1769) were indeed influential in the colonies. He argued that English common law was consistent with biblical morality and occasionally referenced Scripture. However:

1. Blackstone defended monarchy, hereditary privilege, and the divine right of kings—all of which the American Revolutionaries rejected.
2. His writings were used selectively by the Founders—as a source of legal theory, not theological doctrine (Dreisbach, 2002).
3. His religious references were moral endorsements, not legal citations.

As legal scholar Harold Berman notes, Blackstone's Christian framing reflected the culture of his time, but “common law itself evolved as a secular institution” (Berman, 1983, p. 145).

Biblical Law and American Law Are Not the Same

It's important to distinguish biblical commandments from constitutional principles. Consider the following:

Biblical Law	American Constitutional Law
Punishment for blasphemy, adultery, Sabbath violations (Leviticus 20)	No laws criminalizing private religious or moral behavior
No trial by jury or due process	Guaranteed jury trial and due process (6th & 14th Amendments)
Laws based on divine command	Laws based on human reason, precedent, and consent

Even biblical ideas like “you shall not favor the rich or the poor in judgment” (Leviticus 19:15) may be echoed in American ideals of blind justice, but these are moral parallels, not legal imports.

Legal Innovations Came from Secular Sources

The Constitution and legal principles in early America drew heavily from:

- **Montesquieu:** Separation of powers
- **John Locke:** Natural rights and the social contract
- **Cicero and Roman law:** Due process and republican governance
- **English legal tradition:** Habeas corpus, common law precedent

These thinkers and traditions were not biblical, though many were compatible with Christian morality. The point is not that Christianity was irrelevant—but that it was not foundational to the legal design of the United States.

Summary Judgment

Claim	Historical Reality
Common law comes from the Bible	It comes from centuries of English legal precedent , with some moral influence from Christianity
Blackstone proves America’s laws are biblical	Blackstone’s work was selectively used , and his religious framing was not adopted into U.S. law
Legal justice in the U.S. is based on Scripture	It’s based on Enlightenment and classical legal theory , often in contrast to religious codes

Biblical morality may inspire many Americans—but U.S. law is governed by reason, not revelation.

Section VII: Deuteronomy, Sermons, and Public Rhetoric

Charlie Kirk and others have argued that the Book of Deuteronomy was the most quoted source—religious or secular—during the Founding Era, supposedly surpassing Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke or Montesquieu. The implication is clear: if the Founders quoted the Bible more than any other text, then biblical law must have been the legal foundation of the new republic (Kirk, 2023).

This argument conflates rhetorical and theological influence with legal and constitutional design. While Deuteronomy and other books of the Bible were frequently cited in public sermons and political discourse, they were not the intellectual basis of the U.S. Constitution or legal system. The most-cited authors in actual founding documents, debates, and constitutional writings were overwhelmingly secular political philosophers, not biblical prophets (Lutz, 1984).

The Study Behind the Claim

The main source for the “Deuteronomy was the most cited” claim is a 1984 study by historian Donald S. Lutz, titled *The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late 18th Century American Political Thought*. The study reviewed:

- Over 15,000 political documents from 1760 to 1805.
- The sources quoted in pamphlets, sermons, speeches, and newspapers—not necessarily in constitutional or legal texts.

Lutz did find that Deuteronomy was the single most-cited book, with biblical references making up about one-third of all citations in political writing (Lutz, 1984). However:

80% of biblical citations occurred in sermons, not legal documents (Lutz, 1984, p. 191).

The heavy citation of the Bible was not surprising—most public speakers at the time were ministers, and sermons served as political communication tools, especially during the Revolution. But quoting Scripture to inspire moral virtue is not the same as using it to draft legal codes.

Founders Quoted Enlightenment Thinkers in Government Design

When it came to actual governance and constitutional structure, the most influential thinkers were:

- **Montesquieu** – separation of powers
- **John Locke** – natural rights and social contract
- **Blackstone** – legal precedent and common law theory
- **Cicero** – Roman republican ideals

According to Lutz’s same study:

- Montesquieu was cited more than any other individual thinker in constitutional debates.
- Locke and Blackstone were central to the design of American legal and political institutions (Lutz, 1984).

Thus, while ministers inspired revolution through moral exhortation, the framers built the Constitution on secular philosophical frameworks.

Deuteronomy's Real Role: Rhetorical, Not Legal

Deuteronomy's popularity can be attributed to:

- Its emphasis on covenant, which mirrored the colonists' idea of a social contract.
- Its moral authority as a familiar and respected religious text.
- Its narrative of nation-building under divine law, which resonated in a time of political transformation.

But Deuteronomy also contains:

- Laws calling for execution for disobedient children (Deut. 21:18–21)
- Mandated stoning for adultery (Deut. 22:22)
- Severe theocratic punishments for nonbelievers

These laws are incompatible with the U.S. Constitution, which:

- Forbids cruel and unusual punishment (8th Amendment)
- Establishes due process and individual rights
- Guarantees religious liberty, not theological orthodoxy

If Deuteronomy truly formed the basis of U.S. law, the Constitution would look radically different—and unconstitutional by modern standards.

Summary Judgment

Claim	Historical Reality
Deuteronomy was the most cited founding text	Only in sermons and pamphlets, not in legal or constitutional documents
Biblical law shaped the Constitution	Locke, Montesquieu, and Enlightenment thinkers were primary influences
Founders used the Bible as a blueprint	They used it for moral inspiration, not legal architecture

The Founders were deeply influenced by Enlightenment philosophy and English law—not Levitical codes or Mosaic punishments.

Section VIII: John Adams and “A Religious People” — Misquoted, Misused

One of the most frequently cited pieces of “evidence” by Christian nationalists is a single sentence from a 1798 letter by John Adams, the second President of the United States:

“Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

— John Adams, Letter to the Massachusetts Militia, October 11, 1798

Charlie Kirk and others argue that this proves the Constitution is not merely compatible with Christianity, but designed specifically for Christians, and cannot function without them (Kirk, 2023). This interpretation, however, both misquotes Adams’ intent and ignores the broader context of his political philosophy and public actions.

When read in full and considered in historical context, Adams’ statement is not a call for Christian government—it is a warning that liberty requires virtue, and that free societies depend on ethical citizens, not on state-enforced religion (Holmes, 2006; Kramnick & Moore, 1996).

What Adams Really Meant

The key to understanding this quote is the phrase “moral and religious people.” Adams was concerned that without internal moral restraint, people would abuse liberty, leading to chaos and tyranny. His concern was civic virtue, not sectarian theology.

As he wrote in a separate letter:

“We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion... Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people.”
(Adams, 1798)

Notice: he is not arguing that the Constitution was built for Christians, but for people who govern themselves by conscience and moral law—which he believed religion could support.

Adams’ Own Faith Was Complex

John Adams was a Unitarian, a believer in God but a critic of orthodox Christianity. He rejected the Trinity, eternal damnation, and church authority over government. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson in 1823, he wrote:

“The divinity of Jesus is made a convenient cover for absurdity.” (Adams, 1823/1971)

He did believe religion was useful for shaping moral character, but he was deeply suspicious of religious control over public life. This is consistent with many other Founders, including

Jefferson, Franklin, and Madison—personal belief in God, paired with a political commitment to religious freedom.

Treaty of Tripoli: Adams Affirmed U.S. Secularism

Just one year before writing his 1798 letter, President Adams signed the Treaty of Tripoli (1797), which was unanimously ratified by the U.S. Senate. Article 11 famously states:

“The Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.”

If Adams truly believed the Constitution only worked under a Christian framework, he would not have allowed such a clear, public, and official declaration of secular neutrality—especially in an international treaty.

Virtue ≠ Theocracy

What Adams and other Founders feared was moral collapse, not religious diversity. They knew that liberty was fragile, and that a republic could only function if people behaved ethically. Religion was one path to virtue, but not the only one—and certainly not a requirement for citizenship or governance.

Their solution was not to enshrine Christianity in law, but to create a system where faith was free, voluntary, and never enforced by government (Dreisbach, 2002).

Summary Judgment

Claim	Historical Reality
Adams said the Constitution is only for Christians	Adams said it’s only for moral and religious people, not necessarily Christians
The U.S. Constitution depends on Christian law	Adams signed the Treaty of Tripoli, affirming a secular government
Founders supported state-enforced Christianity	Adams rejected orthodoxy and supported freedom of conscience

Adams valued religion for promoting virtue—but he never called for a Christian theocracy. His words have been weaponized out of context.

Section IX: The Danger of the “Christian Nation” Narrative

The idea that America was founded as a Christian nation is more than just a historical error—it is a political and legal distortion with dangerous implications. By rewriting the Constitution’s

secular foundation to fit a religious agenda, modern Christian nationalists threaten the very liberty the Founders sought to protect.

Charlie Kirk and others present this argument as a defense of morality and order. But the call to formally re-Christianize American government is not about private belief—it's about power. It rebrands pluralism as weakness, paints secularism as betrayal, and opens the door to discrimination, censorship, and theocratic control (Whitehead & Perry, 2020). In doing so, it weaponizes faith against the very values that allow it to flourish.

Christian Nationalism Is Not Christianity

To be clear, **Christian nationalism is not the same as Christian faith**. Christianity, like all religions, flourishes best in an environment of **freedom, conscience, and voluntary commitment**. The Founders understood this. That's why they protected faith by **keeping government out of it**.

Christian nationalism, by contrast, seeks to **merge religious identity with national identity**, turning belief into a prerequisite for power and belonging. It implies that non-Christians—or the wrong kind of Christians—are **less American**. It distorts patriotism into dogma.

As sociologists Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry explain:

“Christian nationalism... seeks to privilege a specific cultural template of ‘Christianity’ and fuse it with American identity, often at the expense of democratic pluralism.” (Whitehead & Perry, 2020, p. 10)

Historical Distortion as Political Strategy

Christian nationalist arguments often rely on:

- **Selective quotation** (e.g., Adams’ “moral and religious people”)
- **False equivalence** (e.g., sermons = laws)
- **Appeals to authority** (e.g., Blackstone’s personal beliefs)
- **Omission of key facts** (e.g., Treaty of Tripoli)

This historical cherry-picking is not merely academic—it is a deliberate attempt to reframe the Constitution to fit modern culture war agendas. Once history is altered, policy can be justified, including:

- Religious tests for public office
- Mandatory school prayer
- Discrimination in the name of “religious liberty”
- Denial of civil rights to minority groups

Truth matters. If we lose historical integrity, we risk building a future on lies.

The Irony: Christian Liberty Is Protected by Secular Government

America’s separation of church and state has allowed Christianity—and all religions—to flourish without persecution. The U.S. has more churches per capita than any other developed nation (Pew Research Center, 2015), and Americans are still more religious than Europeans, despite having a secular Constitution.

In countries with state churches, religion has often become bureaucratic, ceremonial, and spiritually hollow. In America, freedom has allowed it to remain vibrant and diverse (Kramnick & Moore, 1996).

If we begin to conflate religious identity with national power, we risk turning faith into a political weapon—and destroying the moral foundation it was meant to support.

Summary Judgment

Claim	Reality
Christian nationalism protects faith	It politicizes and corrupts faith
America is in crisis because it abandoned Christianity	Our crisis stems from moral confusion , not lack of official religion
Christianity should guide law	Faith is strongest when it’s free, not forced

The Founders gave us something rare: a country where you could believe anything—and still belong. Let’s not destroy that in the name of fear, nostalgia, or partisan identity.

Section X: Reframing the Truth — Christian in Culture, Secular in Structure

America’s founding was not a rejection of religion—nor was it a religious founding. It was something far more nuanced, intentional, and radical: the creation of a secular government built by religious people to protect freedom of conscience for all.

The Founders were, in large part, Christians—but they did not create a Christian nation. Instead, they forged a system that refused to establish any one religion, while affirming the right of all people to worship freely, or not at all (Dreisbach, 2002; Holmes, 2006). This design was not a loophole or oversight. It was the foundation of a revolutionary idea: that faith is best preserved when it is protected from the state, not enforced by it.

A Christian Cultural Heritage, Not a Christian Government

There is no question that the United States was shaped by Judeo-Christian moral norms, particularly among the early Protestant population. Principles like individual dignity, personal responsibility, and the importance of charity and justice have strong roots in Scripture and echoed through American civic life (Noll, 2002).

But cultural influence is not the same as legal authority. The Constitution reflects the Enlightenment belief that truth does not need state enforcement. It also recognizes that government, once empowered to regulate religion, inevitably becomes its corrupter.

As Thomas Jefferson wrote:

“It is error alone which needs the support of government. Truth can stand by itself.” (Jefferson, 1786)

Pluralism Is a Strength, Not a Threat

The genius of the American system is that it does not ask what a person believes—it asks how they act in a free society. It does not require citizens to be Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or atheist. It requires only that they respect one another’s freedom and live under shared laws, equally applied.

In a world increasingly divided by ideology, this pluralistic ideal is not a sign of decay—it is a profound source of stability and peace. America has endured because it is not bound by religious uniformity, but by constitutional principles that transcend any one faith.

Our Duty: Defend Liberty by Defending Truth

To protect religious liberty, we must protect the truth about our founding. That means resisting the urge to rewrite history, even when the revision flatters our faith. It also means honoring the real vision of the Founders—a nation built for moral and self-governing people, but governed by law, not creed.

We do not need to turn America into a Christian nation. It is already a place where Christianity can thrive freely, alongside every other belief system. That is not a weakness. It is a testament to the strength of the Constitution—and to the enduring power of conscience over coercion.

Final Summary

Reality	Why It Matters
The Founders were largely Christian	Acknowledge their personal beliefs
The Constitution is secular by design	It protects all faiths and none
Christian nationalism distorts history	It risks religious liberty for everyone
Religious freedom is strongest under secular law	Truth does not need force—it needs freedom

We honor the Founders best not by claiming they created a theocracy, but by preserving the liberty they enshrined for all, not by claiming they created a theocracy.

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