

**Posted on Mon, Oct. 31, 2005  
Thank God we have a godless Constitution**

**The claim that America began as a Christian nation rewrites history.**

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**Special to the Observer**

**Modern-day conservatives say our nation began as a Christian nation but, through liberal courts and judges, has become secularized. Nothing could be farther from the truth.**

**In their book "The Godless Constitution," Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore assert that the framers of the U.S. Constitution and its amendments were aware of Europe's history of ecclesiastical tyranny and violence, and they intended to create a godless constitution and a secular government.**

**What is true is that many, but not all, of our founding fathers were deeply religious people. It also is true that the Declaration of Independence invokes the Creator in laying out the human rights that propelled the colonists to revolt against England. The Articles of Confederation of 1776, America's first framework for government, does give credit to "the Great Governor of the World." It is accurate that most of the earliest state constitutions contained an explicit acknowledgement of God, and 11 of those 13 state constitutions had a religious test for an individual to pass to become an elected official.**

**Government defined in secular terms**

**All of which makes the achievement of a secular government by the framers of the Constitution so remarkable. When they wrote our Constitution, they made no mention of God, Jesus or Christianity. The Constitution's sole reference to religion was one that restricted religion. Article 6 declares "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." A person's religious convictions, or his lack of religious convictions, were irrelevant in judging the value of his political opinion or in assessing his qualifications to hold political office. So successful were the drafters of the Constitution in defining government in secular terms that one of the most powerful criticisms of the Constitution in the ratification process was that it was indifferent to God. During the ratification conventions in the states, outraged Protestants advocating a Christian commonwealth proposed specific changes in the Constitution -- all of which, fortunately, were rejected.**

**The movement to make the United States a Christian nation has never died and has had some success. In 1863 God entered in, of all places, the U.S. currency. "In God We Trust" was printed on our money. The move to a Christian commonwealth had another success in 1912 with mail service no longer providing seven-day service. And in 1954 God made it into**

**the Pledge of Allegiance. The author of the pledge, Francis Bellamy, a socialist, had left God out.**

**Recently, individuals wanting the U.S. to be a Christian nation are trying to get God back in school, as if God could be taken out of schools. What has been restricted is forced prayer. School children and employees can voluntarily pray any time they want to pray.**

**The modern proponents of a Christian commonwealth also are trying to get the Ten Commandments posted in public places.**

**Study free-thinker Thomas Jefferson**

**Being a Baptist -- a denomination that historically stressed freedom of religion, included freedom from religion -- I wish I could force others not to pray or read the Ten Commandments, but to learn about Thomas Jefferson.**

**When Jefferson ran for president he was accused of being an infidel by religious conservatives, but he was a free-thinking Christian. Jefferson wrote: "Almighty God hath created the mind free." Unfortunately, preachers, according to Jefferson, had missed this important development. Jefferson believed all denominations should be like the Quakers, who don't have clergy. Jefferson said clergy -- he called them the irritable tribe of priests -- had perverted Christianity into "an engine for enslaving mankind, a mere contrivance to filch wealth and power to themselves."**

**In addition, Jefferson noted "all priests dread the advance of science. They preach bigotry and fanaticism at the expense of human reason. A band of dupes and impostors, they sponsor ignorance, absurdity, untruth, charlatanism, and falsification." Jefferson, aware of the violent nature of Christians, wrote: "Millions of innocent men, women, and children, since the introduction of Christianity have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned."**

**Religious nation, but not government.**

**The framers of our nation's Constitution shared a conviction that religious beliefs should not divide or destroy a nation. They did not want America to be godless, only its Constitution and government. The framers knew there were many versions of Christianity, that Christians could be un-Christian to other Christians and to non-Christians, and that "in your face" religion was not healthy for the country.**

**They were aware religious correctness and people who were sure of God's will could be very dangerous. And for their wisdom and foresight we should all be thankful.**

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