

The Christian America Myth

Jim Hill shares his opinion and a bit of history on the question of the United States' Christian foundations ...

For the past several years, rhetoric from the Christian right has risen in both volume and pitch. "America was founded as a Christian nation!" "This country was built on Judeo-Christian values!"

Yet the facts bear out a different story altogether. The founding fathers were, in fact, deists. The foundering fathers were freethinkers who believed in the possibility of the existence of God, but not in the *Bible* as necessarily the divine, inspired word of God. Deists put their faith in man's ability to use common sense and reason when solving social and political problems.

Nevertheless, televangelist Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, among others, continue to insist that early American leaders were practicing Christians, building the country with the *Bible* as a guide. These televangelists seem more than willing to ignore, for example, Thomas Jefferson's many stated thoughts on the subject. "There is not one redeeming feature in our superstition of Christianity," Jefferson wrote, in *Notes on the State of Virginia*. "It has made one half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites." In fact, Jefferson created his own version of the *Bible* - editing with scissors - leaving out the resurrection and parts crediting Jesus performing miracles. Somehow, fundamentalists forget that bit of heresy.

Jefferson's election campaign of 1800 faced enormous opposition from Christian clergy, who, not unlike Pat Robertson in declaring God would punish Orlando with meteors for allowing "Gay Day" at Disney World, declared great punishments from God if Christians voted for the "infidel from Virginia."

Fundamentalists continue to revise history in their quest to overtake the government to "return" America to her "Christian" roots.

In spite of the fact that the founding fathers were not Christian, Christianity and the *Bible* were used frequently throughout American history to provide specious reasoning

and "God's justification" for many actions that stand as horrible dark spots on American history.

Early American settlers left England ostensibly to escape religious persecution, but soon thought nothing of persecuting and killing others who didn't share their "inspired" views, or who refused to convert to their stiflingly small-minded brand of religion.

"Witches" were hanged or drowned in Salem, Massachusetts, during a period of extreme fundamentalism thought at the time to be "inspired by God." Televangelist Pat Robertson apparently believes "witches" are still a problem. He says, "The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women ... it is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians." (Pat Robertson, 1992)

In earlier days, Native Americans were deemed "inhuman savages" and were driven from their homes and destroyed. This "biblically-justified" slaughter carried on for years later evolved into "manifest destiny," the absurd belief that God commanded "white" men to take over the entire continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Manifest Destiny whipped men into a patriotic frenzy and the rhetoric of the time helped them see their fellow man as something less than human, and therefore easier to kill without remorse.

Americans also found "justification" for Slavery in the *Bible*. Verses referring to the "mark of Cain," and to "the Curse of Ham" were twisted to explain Africans and to

"During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What has been its fruits? More or less, in all places, pride and indolence in the clergy; ignorance and servility in the laity; in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution."

- James Madison

"It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are 20 gods, or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg."

- Thomas Jefferson

"The Constitution of the United States, for instance, is a marvelous document for self-government by the Christian people. But the minute you turn the document into the hands of non-Christian people and atheistic people they can use it to destroy the very foundation of our society. And that's what's been happening."

- Pat Robertson, The 700 Club, Dec. 30, 1981

“Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the church, and the private schools, supported entirely by private contributions. Keep the church and the state forever separated.”

- Ulysses S. Grant

excuse the forced importation and enslavement of Africans. Many years later, abolitionists used the same bible to show the evils of slavery.

Immigration provided another occasion to use the *Bible*, this time to “prove” the inferiority of the immigrants, especially those who were Catholics. Christian leaders declared Catholics a threat to America, claiming Catholics’ first allegiance was to the Pope in Rome. The Ku Klux Klan, famous for its hatred of blacks, also terrorized Catholics and other immigrants, as well as Jews and later, homosexuals. Most don’t realize that the KKK considers itself a Christian organization, and that the burning cross is actually, in their vernacular, an “illumination” of the cross, sometimes accomplished by stringing Christmas lights over it, rather than setting it ablaze.

Recently Catholics have come under attack again, as many fundamentalist Christians today claim Catholics are not true Christians ... and again, the *Bible* is used to “prove” this bias. “Where does the bible mention a Pope? Where does the bible mention confession?”

Those of other religions and beliefs in the United States are also targeted anew, this time for conversion rather than death or ostracism. Recently Southern Baptists commanded their members to pray during Jewish Holy Days for Jews to convert to Christianity and to pray that “Jewish people would be free of the strong influence of materialism.” The action outraged Jewish leaders.

Lately rhetoric against gays is getting louder as well. After years of Christian condemnation, alternately declaring gays “sick” or “demonic,” fundamentalist Christians have recently employed a new tactic - the idea that gays can be “healed” of homosexuality through a belief in Jesus. Fundamentalist “ex-gay ministries” routinely claim that “thousands” of “ex-gays” have been “led out of the homosexual ‘lifestyle.’” Rather than submitting statistics to any peer-reviewed medical or scientific journal, they instead rely on purchasing newspaper ads to get their point across - even though both the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association have declared “ex-gay” therapy useless and potentially harmful to participants.

Tune in to a Christian or conservative radio show, or load a conservative Web site and you’ll find page after page condemning “liberals” for everything from tearing down the government to promoting a dreaded “New World Order.” The very word “liberal” has come to mean “bad” in conservative circles, yet it’s thrown about so often the meaning can only be “anyone who disagrees with us.” Again, this is not a new tactic. Only a few years ago, this polarization of “liberals” impacted human history for all time, yet the following speech could easily appear in tomorrow’s news:

“The national government ... will maintain and defend the foundations on which the power of our nation rests. It will offer strong protection to Christianity as the very basis of our collective morality ... Today Christians ... stand at the head of [the nation] ... I pledge that I never will tie myself to parties who want to destroy Christianity ... We want to fill our culture again with the Christian spirit ... We want to burn out all the recent immoral developments in literature, in the theater, and in the press - in short, we want to burn out the poison of immorality which has entered into our whole life and culture as a result of liberal excess during the past ... [few] years.” - Adolph Hitler

The message is becoming increasingly obvious, now as it was 60-odd years ago: If you don’t think, live, look and act just like us, you are wrong, you are damned and you are below us.

The religious right seeks nothing less than control over the government, the land, and everyone in it, and will use any means at their disposal to achieve their goals; especially the *Bible*.

“I want you to just let a wave of intolerance wash over you. I want you to let a wave of hatred wash over you. Yes, hate is good ... Our goal is a Christian nation. We have a Biblical duty, we are called by God, to conquer this country. We don’t want equal time. We don’t want pluralism.”

-Randall Terry, Founder of Operation Rescue, The News-Sentinel, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 8-16-93

“Persecution is not an original feature in any religion; but it is always the strongly marked feature of all religions established by law.”

- Thomas Paine

“In every country and every age, the priest has been hostile to liberty. He is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection to his own. It is easier to acquire wealth and power by this combination than by deserving them, and to effect this, they have perverted the purest religion ever preached to man into mystery and jargon, unintelligible to all mankind, and therefore the safer for their purposes.”

- Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to Horatio Spafford, 1814

“Liberalism bought a pact with the devil.”

-Newt Gingrich, at the Christian Coalition’s “Road to Victory” Conference, Washington, DC, 1995