



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on February 17, 2010

## NYT Admits America a Christian Nation (Sort of)

The New York Times published a valentine of sorts to Christians in its February 14 Sunday news magazine, admitting that the United States was founded in part as a Christian nation.

In the massive 8,000-word essay by Russell Shorto, the *Times* [describes](#) the culture war across the nation and gives bad news to militant atheists: “There is, however, one slightly awkward issue for hard-core secularists who would combat what they see as a Christian whitewashing of American history: the Christian activists have a certain amount of history on their side.”



Couched primarily in the terms of the annual textbook battle in Texas government schools, the article describes a coalition of evangelical Christians opposed to censoring out America’s Christian heritage from high school textbooks. Shorto explains the origin of the phrase “wall of separation between church and state” is not the U.S. Constitution or its amendments, but rather from a [private letter](#) to Connecticut Baptists from a recently-elected President Jefferson. Connecticut’s state government at that time maintained a state church that funded the Congregationalist ministers from the state treasury (and [continued to maintain a state church until 1818](#)), and even the Baptists of the time acknowledged to Jefferson that he could do nothing constitutionally to stop the state church. Shorto [adds](#) that:

Nine colonies developed state churches, which were supported financially by the colonial governments and whose power was woven in with that of the governments. Other Christians — Lutherans, Baptists, Quakers — and, of course, those of other faiths were made unwelcome, if not persecuted outright. There was a religious element to the American Revolution, which was so pronounced that you could just as well view the event in religious as in political terms.

The last state to give up a state-funded church establishment was Massachusetts, whose religious provisions had been placed in the state constitution at the insistence of Samuel Adams. Massachusetts [amended its own constitution in 1832](#) to remove the religious establishment the following year, but the federal government had absolutely no role in its repeal.

Shorto even goes on to [note](#) that “In fact, the founders were rooted in Christianity — they were inheritors of the entire European Christian tradition — and at the same time they were steeped in an Enlightenment rationalism that was, if not opposed to religion, determined to establish separate spheres for faith and reason.”

This may be the biggest error of the article. The so-called “conflict” between faith and reason has long been a shibboleth among atheistic pseudo-intellectuals, especially during the Enlightenment. While many Enlightenment authors opposed religion altogether — and therefore put reason and religion as opposing forces — the Enlightenment authors that most influenced Britain (and therefore the American Founders) were explicitly Christian: Locke, Montesquieu, and Blackstone.



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Shorto [summarizes](#) his personal opinion using a quote by the neo-conservative Richard Brookheiser: "Or, as Brookheiser rather succinctly summarizes the point: 'The founders were not as Christian as those people would like them to be, though they weren't as secularist as Christopher Hitchens would like them to be.'"

One can quibble about whether a person can be a Christian in degrees — aren't all Christians asked to give their *whole* lives to the Savior of the world? — but hey, this is the secular leftist *New York Times* we're talking about. We'll take any concessions we can get.

*Photo of President George H.W. Bush, Barbara Bush, Gen. Colin Powell and Catherine Stevens, wife of Sen. Ted Stevens, (R-Alaska) at 1992 National Prayer breakfast: AP Images*



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