

CHRISTIANITY OR DEISM?

THE FAITH OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS

EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE PRESENTATION DECEMBER 2009

RANDY HROZIENCIK
ADULT EDUCATION MINISTRY TEAM LEADER
BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH
GALESBURG, ILLINOIS

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Ralph Benejam

Member, Elder and an Adult Education Instructor at Bethel Baptist Church in Galesburg, Illinois

Robin James

Author of the webpage “American Values, Christian Deism”

www.christiandeist.com

Bob Johnson

Founder and Director of the World Union of Deists

www.deism.com

Lee Johnson

Senior Pastor at Bethel Baptist Church in Galesburg, Illinois

Ray Kimbell

Member and an Adult Education Instructor at Bethel Baptist Church in Galesburg, Illinois

John Lindell

Author of the webpage “Christian Deism and the Human Jesus” and founder of the Christian Deist Fellowship

www.christiandeistfellowship.com

Roger Mohr

Carl Sandburg College Professor of Philosophy and Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship at Burlington, Iowa

Fred Visel

Carl Sandburg College Professor of History and Geography

Dotty Wheeler

Member at Bethel Baptist Church in Galesburg, Illinois

INTRODUCTION

Long before my conversion to Christianity at 30 years of age, I had both read and heard it stated that “America is a nation founded by Christians, with the intention of being a nation dedicated to Christ.” Since I had no reason to doubt this statement – it did, after all, appear to be true as based upon the numerous churches that seemed to be everywhere – I thought little of it. In fact, if asked what my religious affiliation was I answered “Christian” since I grew up in America and

therefore considered myself a Christian by default. Eventually, however, I both read and heard a very different statement regarding the faiths of the Founding Fathers: “America is a nation founded by Deists and was never intended to be a Christian nation.” My first thought was “What on earth is a Deist?”

It is important to understand that this is a very sensitive matter for many Christians as well as for many Deists. Many devout followers of Christ are convinced that America was founded by Christians with the intention of being a Christian nation, and some become upset over the claim that America is anything less than Christian. The claim that many of the Founding Fathers were Deists is almost blasphemous to these people. On the flip side, many Deists feel that their beliefs have largely been ignored by modern Americans, and they are quite upset that many Americans are unaware that Deism played a major role in the religious viewpoints of some of the Founding Fathers. My purpose in this paper is certainly not to upset anyone, but rather to get at the heart of the matter and “dig for the truth.”

I have been researching the various worldview philosophies for the past three years, most extensively studying Atheism and Pantheism, and now feel ready to undertake a thorough study of Deism. The research for this paper has, in large part, served this purpose.

OVERVIEW OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL WORLDVIEWS

A philosophical worldview is simply the belief system that describes how people view the world around them and their place in the world. Christian author James Sire gives a more theological definition of worldview:

A worldview is a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world.

-THE UNIVERSE NEXT DOOR (3rd edition) by James Sire (1997), p. 16.

Worldview tackles the big questions of life such as the existence and nature of God, the problem of suffering and evil and what happens to us when we die. The study of the different worldviews is crucial in understanding the beliefs of others, as all people in the world subscribe, at least in general, to the belief system of one of the worldviews. Some have even combined worldviews.¹ All religions fit into a worldview in terms of their beliefs. If it can be shown that a worldview is based upon faulty logic, then any religion which fits into that worldview will also be in error. Rather than taking the time to tackle the different religions of the world individually, many Christian apologists will instead focus on examining the beliefs of others in terms of worldview. With that in mind, let us take a brief look at the different worldviews and how Deism fits into the big picture.

THE BASIC WORLDVIEWS

The basic worldviews are Atheism, Monotheism, Pantheism, Deism, Panentheism, Finite Godism and Polytheism.² Atheism is the belief that there is no God, no soul which survives death, no angels (good or bad) and no Heaven or Hell. In Atheism nothing exists beyond nature; all that exists is made up of atoms and molecules. Atheism is also known as Naturalism, since nature is believed to be all there is, or Materialism since matter is believed to be all there is. Atheism in ancient Greece was defined as either the severing of relationships with the gods or a denial of the existence of the gods, and in 18th century Europe the term meant a denial specifically of the Judeo-Christian God, but today Atheism always refers to the denial of a Supreme Being (as variously defined) and the denial of the supernatural realm – Heaven, Hell and all that is included in them.

Monotheism is the belief in one God who is separate and distinguishable from the universe, and intervenes in this world. Monotheists typically believe in the soul, angels (good and bad) and Heaven and Hell. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are Monotheistic and comprise roughly half of the world's population.

Pantheism is the belief that there is a supreme force which is indistinguishable from the universe and this force is found in everything and links everything together ("God is all, and all is One"). The god of Pantheism is a force rather than a being with the attributes of personality, much like "The Force" of the Star Wars movies. In Pantheism there is no appreciable difference between the Creator and the creation. Pantheism is the worldview of many of the Eastern world religions as well as New Age spirituality in the West.

The above three worldviews are considered by many scholars to be the most prevalent in the world today. There are, however, four other worldviews.

Deism, the focus of this paper, is the belief that the universe was created by God – also commonly referred to by Deists as the First Cause, the Prime Mover, the Grand Architect of the Universe or simply Nature's God – who then stepped back after the creation in order to allow everything to "evolve on its own." Therefore many Deists believe that God does not intervene in the affairs of people. However, some Deists do allow for a God who occasionally intercedes in the affairs of human beings; keep in mind that there is a lot of room for differing opinions within each of the different worldviews.

Panentheism is the belief that there is a supreme force which is distinguishable from the universe, but this supreme force depends upon the universe and the universe depends upon this supreme force, and both are evolving over time. Panentheism is considered by many to be the bridge between Monotheism and Pantheism, and is the worldview that was held by some of the ancient Greek philosophers such as Diogenes. Jewish, Christian and Islamic mystics, who seek a mystical experience with God based primarily upon emotions and less on Divine revelation (scripture), typically hold to the Panentheistic view of God.

Finite Godism is the belief that God exists but is limited by something else besides His own nature. In other words, God is a finite being who is not All-Powerful as God is described in the Bible and Qur'an. What limits God could be another god, as in dualism (the Good God and the Bad God), or even the matter and energy of the universe. Open theology is an example of Finite Godism.

Polytheism is the belief in many gods. Most ancient civilizations believed in different gods and goddesses who represented certain aspects of both life and the afterlife. Mormonism is a modern example of Polytheism, as founder Joseph Smith taught that people have the potential to become gods and goddesses who will rule over their own planets after this earthly life is over.

THE APPEAL OF DEISM

Deism may not be considered by most philosophers to be one of the major worldviews in terms of prevalence and influence, but I would disagree. I believe that Deism is very popular not only in America but throughout the Western world today. I would even say that Deism may be a fourth major worldview. However, many people who are Deists at heart may not even be familiar with the terms Deism or Deist³. That was certainly the case for me prior to my conversion to Christianity. Looking back, I would describe myself in my young adult years as being a combination of Deist and Unitarian Universalist, despite having no knowledge of these terms until rather recently in life. I know that I am not the only one who can be described in this way. It has been demonstrated by surveys that Atheists are a relatively minor percentage of the American population⁴; the vast majority of people believe in God.⁵ Yet so many today are skeptical of the claim that the Bible, or any other so-called holy book, is truly from God. So many of these skeptics view all religious writings as being nothing more than the mythologies of the past and the

religious musings of “primitive” thinkers. These people see the evidence for God all around them but deny that the Creator has revealed information to us in the written word, using chosen people of the past as Divinely-inspired writers (prophets and apostles). They are essentially Deists, whether they are familiar with the term or not. Recent articles on the prevalence of Deism in America⁶ and in Great Britain⁷ illustrate this point.

UNDERSTANDING DEISM

The following two quotes provide insight into Deist thinking. This first quote really defines what Deism is all about:

Are you a Deist? You might be if:

- 1. You believe in God but are not accepting of the authoritarian creeds of any particular religion.**
- 2. You believe that God's word is the universe (nature), not human-written holy books.**
- 3. You like to reason or speculate what God might be like rather than be taught about it.**
- 4. You think that religious ideas should reconcile with and not contradict science.**
- 5. You believe God can be best found outside rather than inside a church building.**
- 6. You enjoy the freedom of seeking spirituality on your own.**
- 7. You are morally guided by ethics and conscience rather than by scriptures.**
- 8. You are an individual thinker whose religious beliefs are not formed from tradition or authority.**
- 9. You like to call yourself rational or spiritual before you call yourself religious.**
- 10. You believe that religion and government (church and state) should be separate.**

Deists do not believe in "Revealed Religions". These would be religions where God supposedly spoke to a few select individuals, and then relied on them to accurately write down what he told them in "Holy Books". Deists don't deny that someone might possibly have a direct revelation from God. However, that sort of revelation would be a revelation to that person only. If that person then tells us that he had a divine revelation, for us that would be second-hand revelation, and we are not obliged to believe it.

-YOU MIGHT BE A DEIST! by Jay Boswell. Found at www.positivedeism.com/deistdoc2.html

This second quote further defines Deistic philosophy:

Although Deists don't have an official set of tenets, there are a few beliefs that most Deists agree on. Here is a list of seven unofficial basic Deist beliefs:

- 1. Belief in an intelligent designer of the universe.**
- 2. Belief that the intelligent designer is "outside" the universe, and not part of the universe (as in pantheism).**
- 3. Belief that after the Deity created the universe, He stepped away from it to allow it to**

evolve naturally based on the laws of physics which He created without any need for His further intervention.

4. Belief that the Deity does not perform "miracles" which defy the laws of physics, or intervene in a supernatural way in the affairs of mankind.

5. Belief that the Deity does not reveal Himself to mankind through priests or other "enlightened" individuals, but rather through the workings of nature.

6. Belief that the Deity imposes no pre-ordained, or divinely inspired moral code of behavior on mankind, but rather expects man to develop his own codes of conduct for living in harmony with his fellow man based on his God-given reason.

7. Although there is no scientific evidence for an afterlife, most Deists do have a "hope" for an afterlife.

The above list is not intended to be a dogmatic set of rules that Deists must believe. In fact, Deists regularly discuss, debate and modify various aspects of the above items all the time.

-THINGS THAT DEISTS BELIEVE by Richard Albin. Found at www.positivedeism.com/deistdoc2.html

“ATHENS VERSUS JERUSALEM”

In his book **DEISM: A REVOLUTION IN RELIGION, A REVOLUTION IN YOU**, World Union of Deists Founder and Director Bob Johnson makes reference to the symbolic worldview battle between Athens and Jerusalem, with Athens representing reason and Jerusalem representing Divine revelation. Athens, long associated with the birthplace of Greek philosophy, represents the reasoning power of the mind without the influence of religious doctrine and scripture. Jerusalem, the holy city revered by Jews, Christians and Muslims, represents Divine revelation. The Deist claim is that reasoning alone tells us all we can and need to know about God and our place in the universe, whereas those who adhere to a revealed religion insist that we can know little about God apart from Divine revelation. Jews, Christians and Muslims insist that other than the creation revealing the existence of the Creator we can know nothing for certain about God and our relationship to him. This is why we must also rely upon scripture to reveal to us the nature of God.

Deism, which emerged from the political and scientific revolutions of 17th century Europe, was an intellectual revolt against the supernatural worldview of the Medieval and early Renaissance periods. There was a great desire among the intellectuals and political leaders of this time to rid societies of their reliance upon magic and mysticism and to instead understand the world in naturalistic terms. Much of this desire stemmed from the so-called Wars of Religion throughout Western Europe that had caused havoc between Roman Catholics and the newly established Protestant denominations. Many had been left with the idea that religious passions were a sure way to cause political and social upheaval. The societies of Western Europe, which extended to America, were ready for a worldview that emphasized rationality and explained the world in naturalistic or “mechanistic” terms.

Deism experienced a wide appeal throughout 18th century Europe and America, having great influence especially among intellectuals – those who were either political leaders or the academics who strongly influenced them. Famous Deists include French philosopher Voltaire, who has often been mistaken for having been an Atheist, as well as Thomas Paine, the author of **COMMON SENSE** and **THE AGE OF REASON**, and even American statesman and scientist Benjamin Franklin once referred to himself as a Deist.

Deists believe in God the Creator, but not the God described by the Bible. Deists believe that

God has revealed himself to all of humanity through His creation, not through any holy books such as the Bible, the Qur'an or the Hindu writings. Some Deists may hold the Bible and other holy writings in high esteem for the wisdom and moral teachings that are contained in certain passages, whereas other Deists have little if anything positive to say about the Bible or any holy book.

Deists deny the Divinity of Christ, although many consider Jesus to have been a great moral teacher deserving of the utmost respect. Some Deists deny that Jesus even existed.⁸ In general Deists adhere to Darwinian evolution as the explanation for the diversity of life on earth, since the traditional view of Deism is that God began the universe and then stepped back to let the universe and this world evolve on its own into its present state.⁹

Regarding the fallen nature of humanity, Deists deny that people have an inherent fallen nature. The problem of sin and evil may be explained as being evidence that humanity is in need of continued evolution, to get us further away from our "primitive animal ancestry" in which "survival of the fittest" still clouds our moral conduct. Or, according to other Deists, sin and evil may simply be the result of the misuse of the gift of Free Will. Deists also believe that many of humanity's problems stem from the rejection of our God-given reason. Since Deists deny the fallen nature of man, there really is no need of salvation in their worldview.

Deists differ markedly concerning the afterlife. The following quote is from the Wikipedia study on Deism:

Deists held a variety of beliefs about the soul. Some, such as Lord Herbert of Cherbury and William Wollaston, held that souls exist, survive death, and in the afterlife are rewarded or punished by God for their behavior in life. Some, such as Benjamin Franklin, believed in [either] reincarnation or resurrection. Others such as Thomas Paine were agnostic about the immortality of the soul:

"I trouble not myself about the manner of future existence. I content myself with believing, even to positive conviction, that the power that gave me existence is able to continue it, in any form and manner he pleases, either with or without this body; and it appears more probable to me that I shall continue to exist hereafter than that I should have had existence, as I now have, before that existence began." (Thomas Paine, THE AGE OF REASON, Part I)

Still others such as Anthony Collins, Bolingbroke, Thomas Chubb, and Peter Annet were materialists and either denied or doubted the immortality of the soul.

-DEISM. Found at www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deism

DIFFERENCES AMONG DEISTS

Deists, like Christians, differ in their beliefs. For example, Thomas Jefferson – considered by many to have been a Deist – had great respect for the person of Jesus Christ; he even edited the Gospels to emphasize the moral teachings of Christ (**THE JEFFERSON BIBLE**) whom he held to be the greatest teacher of wisdom and morality.¹⁰ On the other hand, Thomas Paine attacked the person of Christ in his classic treatise on Deism and religion titled **THE AGE OF REASON**.

George Washington, considered by many to be a Christian with a strong Deist influence, believed in the guiding power of God in our lives. Once again Thomas Paine, being a traditional Deist, rejected the notion that God would guide us along in life, instead believing that God remained distant and did not intervene in human affairs. The basic rule of worldviews is that there are no rules. Some fundamental basics exist among the various worldviews and religions, but people will always differ in viewpoints even when they are united by a core belief.

Additionally, some Deists have attempted to fuse worldviews. One example of this is Christian

Deism, the blending of traditional Deism with Christian moral teachings. Glenn Sunshine, an expert on the history of worldviews, tells us that most Deists in early America associated themselves with Christianity:

...deists typically saw themselves as Christians. They may have disagreed with the church, with the Bible – with any sense of organized religion, in fact – but they still kept many aspects of the Christian worldview in place...

Since our worldview determines what we think of as reasonable, deists coming out of a Christian tradition naturally brought much of the Christian worldview with them. So most deists in the period can actually be described as “Christian deists,” not because they held to traditional Christian beliefs, but because so much of their thinking was drawn from Christian sources.

-WHY YOU THINK THE WAY YOU DO by Glenn Sunshine (2009), pp. 139-140.

Another example of combined worldviews is Pandeism, the combination of traditional Deism and Pantheism. In this view God precedes and creates the universe but then loses interest in His creation. However, God is viewed as the entirety of the universe and is more impersonal in nature than is the God of traditional Deism.

A DEISTIC APPRECIATION FOR EXPELLED AND RELIGULOUS

Two recent movies have focused attention on the origins debate and religious beliefs in general: **EXPELLED** and **RELIGULOUS**. **EXPELLED**, which highlighted the academic backlash against those who doubt or deny Darwinism, has been embraced by Christians and all who believe in the Creator while at the same time infuriating Atheists and those skeptical of creationism.¹¹ On the other hand, **RELIGULOUS** pokes fun at organized religion, although the examples featured are clearly chosen for that purpose. Needless to say, Christians have been anything but amused by **RELIGULOUS** while Atheists and religious skeptics are still applauding the movie to this moment. Deists, who embrace Freethought¹² – in this case questioning Darwinism – but are dismayed by organized religions are likely applauding both movies. This demonstrates that Deism is the worldview based upon both recognizing the handiwork of the Creator and disillusionment with Divinely revealed religion.

IS RATIONALISM RESERVED ONLY FOR DEISTS?

Is rational thought the sole property of Deists? Is rational thought the sole property of Atheists, for that matter? Each group claims their worldview is the only one which effectively utilizes rational thought, but is this true? Is it possible that Christians can be rational? I have met many Christians who are quite intelligent, well-educated and capable of thinking through a matter logically, yet are humble enough to admit that there is much that we do not, and cannot, know about God. Deists are in full agreement on that point. We are, after all, finite beings who are attempting to comprehend the infinite. The Bible provides us with much knowledge about God, but even with the illumination of scripture there is much we do not know. To say that God does not exist, as Atheists do, or that God never intervenes in our lives, as many Deists do, is assuming too much. There is much that can be misconstrued in the Bible, yet the overall spiritual messages are quite clear: God not only exists but also intervenes in the lives of people.

THE FAITH OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS

Just exactly what qualified one as a Founding Father? David Barton, a leading expert on the religious intentions of the Founding Fathers, provides the following qualifications:

...a “Founding Father” is one who exerted significant influence in, provided prominent

leadership for, or had a substantial impact upon the birth, development, and establishment of America as an independent, self-governing nation.

-ORIGINAL INTENT by David Barton (1996), pp. 123-124.

Barton states that this would include the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence, the 14 different Presidents who governed America from 1774-1789 (prior to the Constitution, the President of the Continental Congress essentially served as the President of America), the 55 men present at the Constitutional Convention, several leaders responsible for the ratification of the Constitution, the 90 members of the First Congress who created the Bill of Rights, the earliest U.S. Supreme Court members who guided the development of the Judiciary System, Washington's cabinet during his administration, and a handful of key military leaders. Allowing for overlap and the inclusion of some key figures not fitting into any of these groups, such as Noah Webster and Thomas Paine, approximately 250 men would be considered Founding Fathers. Listing the "official" religious affiliations of the Founding Fathers demonstrates that the majority were traditional, or Trinitarian, Christians.¹³

WERE ALL THE FOUNDING FATHERS DEISTS?

Some have been quick to say that all of the Founding Fathers were Deists. The following fictional quote, from author Dan Brown (**THE DA VINCI CODE**, **ANGELS AND DEMONS** and **THE LOST SYMBOL**) illustrates this claim:

"Mr. Solomon?" the boy said, sounding puzzled "you said our forefathers fled the religious oppression of Europe to establish a country on the principles of scientific advancement."

"That's correct."

"But...I was under the impression our forefathers were devoutly religious men who founded America as a Christian nation."

Solomon smiled. "My friends, don't get me wrong, our forefathers were deeply religious men, but they were Deists – men who believed in God, but in a universal and open-minded way. The only religious ideal they put forth was religious freedom." He pulled the microphone from the podium and strode out to the edge of the stage. "America's forefathers had a vision of a spiritually enlightened utopia, in which freedom of thought, education of the masses, and scientific advancement would replace the darkness or outdated religious superstitions."

-THE LOST SYMBOL by Dan Brown (2009), p. 407.

To be sure, some of the Founding Fathers were Deists, or at least strongly influenced by Deism. Not all of the Founding Fathers, however. In fact, not even close. On the other hand, not all of the Founding Fathers were Christians, although as mentioned most were Trinitarian Christians. As has been said before, "often the truth is somewhere in the middle."

The following quote highlights how difficult it is to clearly define many of the Founding Fathers:

Google "Deism" and you will find untold numbers of discussions on the religious views of the founders of this country. It seems that groups of all kinds – Christian, Deist, Atheist, and more – want to claim kinship in their views. The fact is that the founders views on religion were as diverse as current society. It is also possible to put a label on very few of them. Most of the leaders were men who thought for themselves and though most were associated with some denomination, they did not agree with 100% of the doctrines. The one thing the majority agreed on, however, was an extreme and well-founded dislike of big government and big religion. They wanted for themselves and this country the liberty of thought and reasoned acts. It matters not at all what religious beliefs these great men held. What matters is that the system they put in motion allows me to hold and express mine.

-THE FOUNDING FATHERS DEBATE. Found at www.christiandeist.com/founding_fathers.htm

PHILOSOPHIES AND RELIGIONS COMMON AT THE TIME OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS

The majority of people living in early America could be religiously classified in one of four groups:

1. Non-Christian Deist
2. Christian Deist, or Christian with a strong Deist influence
3. Unitarian Christian
4. Trinitarian Christian

Deists tended to be of two stripes: those who opposed the teachings of Christianity and strived to point out where they believed the Bible was in error (traditional Deism), and those who blended their Deistic beliefs with Christian moral teachings – examples being Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. John Eidsmoe states that traditional Deism never gained a strong foothold in America:

The colonists were familiar with deist thinking. But deism never gained a strong foothold in America. The first Great Awakening, the religious revival of the 1740s, was partially responsible for cutting short the spread of deism.

In many states at the time of the Constitutional Convention, confessed deists were not allowed to hold public office. Deism was generally held in low esteem, as such laws indicate.

-CHRISTIANITY AND THE CONSTITUTION: THE FAITH OF OUR FOUNDING FATHERS by John Eidsmoe (1987), p. 41.

Eidsmoe goes on to state that of the 55 men present at the Constitutional Convention, Deists were a minority. The 55 men present consisted of 28 Episcopalians, eight Presbyterians, seven Congregationalists, two Lutherans, two Dutch Reformed, two Methodists, two Roman Catholics, three Deists and one unknown. The three Deists were Benjamin Franklin and James Wilson of Pennsylvania and Hugh Williamson of North Carolina, although all three would be more accurately labeled Christian Deists. However, in all fairness it is possible that some of those associated with the Trinitarian denominations may have held Deistic beliefs – most of those linked to Christian Deism were regular church attendees and members. It is clear that traditional Deists who opposed Christianity were a small minority. Most Deists in America at this time held the Bible in high regard. Even the Christian Deists were a minority, however. Yet it is clear that Deism held a strong influence over some of the key Founding Fathers.

Unitarianism, the branch of Christianity that rejected belief in the Trinity, was not a significant denomination in terms of numbers at this time although its influence would become more significant in the 19th century. It is safe to say that most people in early America were Christians who held a Trinitarian belief – God the Father, God the Son (Jesus) and God the Spirit. Although Roman Catholics were among the early settlers in the Americas, especially South America, Central America and Mexico, the majority of people living in America were affiliated with one of the Protestant denominations. The Eastern Orthodox Church, the third major branch in Christendom, was established in America in 1794¹⁴ so has had a lengthy presence in this nation but not as long as either Roman Catholicism or Protestantism, both of which were represented in America from the beginning of European migration.

Additionally, three other religious groups were significant in early America. One group was a small Jewish population, which was significant due to Judaism's inseparable connection to Christianity. The second group consisted of the traditional religions of Africa¹⁵ which surely came over with the slaves, and the third group were the Native Americans who worshipped the Great

PHILOSOPHIES AND RELIGIONS NOT SIGNIFICANT AT THE TIME OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS

Atheists were not a significant part of the founding of this great nation. There were probably some Atheists present in early America, but if so their voice was essentially unheard and they kept a low profile. Occasionally I'll hear the statement "The founders of this nation were Godless", but that is simply not true. The influence of Deism was strong, and some of the key players in the founding of this nation were either Deists or strongly influenced by Deism, but they were anything but Godless. Atheism and Deism should never be considered as being one and the same, for Atheists deny the existence of God while Deists confirm the existence of the Creator. Thomas Paine, despite his disdain for Christianity and the Bible, never denied the existence of the Creator. In fact, I believe that he would be shocked by the prevalence and boldness of modern Atheism in America. One of the reasons Paine wrote **THE AGE OF REASON** was to stop the spread of Atheism in France.¹⁷ Despite being a majority, not all of the Founding Fathers were Christians and certainly not all of the Founding Fathers were Deists, but it can be said that Atheism was simply not a significant part of early American history.

Religions originating in the East, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, were also not a significant part of the American landscape before and during American Independence, although historian David Barton states that people from the East were present in America at this time.¹⁸ It was not until the second half of the 19th century that adherents of these religions really began to make their way to America in significant numbers, and only in the 20th century did this nation see a marked rise in the population of Hindu's, Buddhist's, Muslims and others from the Eastern religions. Hinduism was the first Eastern religion to make a significant spiritual impact in America. Swami Vivekananda, a holy man in his native India, made a name for himself among the world's religious leaders at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. His rising popularity and eventual influence among Americans paved the way for Hinduism in the West and eventually helped give rise to the so-called New Age Movement, which is a blend of Eastern mysticism, Western secularism and occult beliefs. Although Vivekananda is often credited with beginning the "Eastern Invasion," the influence of Eastern thought was first introduced through the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Two of the greatest writers in American history, both had explored Eastern philosophy and religion well ahead of their time.

Buddhism and Confucianism came to America along with the Chinese who labored to build our railroad system, but that happened in the 19th century, well after American Independence. Although the Founding Fathers were well aware of Islam in large part due to the difficulties many of them had dealing with Islamic pirates in the Barbary Coast region, Islamic citizens of America were not significant in number until the 1965 overturn of the Restricted Asian Immigration Act by President Lyndon B. Johnson. This was the most significant factor in Islamic growth in this nation.

The pseudo-Christian religions – those religions which sound Christian in name but differ markedly from orthodox Christian teachings – were not founded until the 19th century. Mormonism, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, was founded by Joseph Smith in the first half of the 19th century, while the Jehovah's Witnesses (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society) and Christian Science did not form until late in that century and more fully developed in the early 20th century. Other religious groups present in American society today were simply not part of the spiritual landscape of this country in the 18th century or earlier, either because they came to America later or had not yet formed.

Occult groups such as Satanists existed in the world during this time in early America, but if they were present in this nation they were likely small in number and were certainly "underground" or secretive. The strong Christian presence in early America would not have allowed for these

groups to take a foothold. Some claim that Freemasons, with their partial reliance upon the ancient mystery religions, espoused occultism and were a very significant group in terms of both numbers and influence. Many of the Founding Fathers – men of high moral caliber whether Christian or Deist – were Freemasons and would not have allowed for the promotion of teachings which may have been deemed a threat to the morality of the nation.¹⁹ Occult groups spread throughout America in the 19th century, especially with the rise in spiritism (contacting the dead) and further increased dramatically throughout the 20th century, but were outwardly insignificant in early America.

THE BELIEFS OF THE PRESIDENTS

It has been suggested that the first five presidents were strongly influenced by Deism, and that is not hard to believe as this Enlightenment philosophy was very influential among the intellectuals of Western Europe and America at this time. The first five presidents as well as Benjamin Franklin were highly educated men – whether formally or self-educated – who were well-versed in philosophy, theology and the sciences.²⁰ However, none of the first five presidents publicly referred to himself as a Deist – not even Thomas Jefferson who, more than the others, exemplified Deistic thought. Only Benjamin Franklin is known to have referred to himself as a Deist, and that was only for a short time in his youth. In all fairness, however, it has been pointed out by some scholars that those Founding Fathers with Deistic leanings kept their Deism at a low profile for political reasons. Author John Eidsmoe states that the American Deists tended to be much more moderate than Deists in Europe.²¹ Certainly they held the scriptures in high regard.

GEORGE WASHINGTON (1732-1799) First President of the United States 1789-1797

George Washington was raised an Anglican/Episcopalian²² and likely held to those beliefs throughout life, but it is safe to say that as an adult he was well aware of Deism and was likely influenced by Deism to some degree, although that is a matter of great contention even to this day. It should be noted that Washington never referred to himself as a Deist publicly or in any existing letters to family or friends. Some of his terms for God were in line with Deism yet fit equally well with orthodox Christianity – this may account for his religious classification by some scholars as "Christian Deist." Mason Locke Weems wrote the first biography of Washington, which was titled **THE LIFE OF GEORGE WASHINGTON; WITH CURIOUS ANECDOTES, EQUALLY HONOURABLE TO HIMSELF, AND EXEMPLARY TO HIS YOUNG COUNTRYMEN.** Written shortly after Washington's death in 1800, this biography has been the most influential and the most widely read of all of Washington's biographies, serving as the foundation for all later works on Washington's life. Weems presents Washington as a committed Christian. Weems, who had once been a guest in Washington's home²³ likely knew Washington well enough to relay firsthand knowledge about his life. The claim that Washington was a Deist began in 1831, six years after the death of Weems and well after the life of Washington and many of Washington's closest peers.

Washington was often silent on the matter of religion as he tended to be quite private and reserved in nature. Bishop William White preached before Washington many times, and commented that Washington was so carefully guarded against discussing himself and his religious views that he understood why people claimed to know little about our first president.²⁴ Washington's view that religious beliefs should be a personal matter accounts for much of the uncertainty regarding his worldview.

Although some commentators label Washington as having been a "non-Christian", especially in light of the well-corroborated fact that he often, but not always, declined to receive Communion²⁵, it is more accurate to say that he was simply very guarded concerning his religious beliefs. Joseph Ellis, in his February 23, 2007 article titled **THE U.S. FOUNDING FATHERS: THEIR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS**²⁶ stated that "Washington harbored a pantheistic sense of providential destiny..." although his reference to Washington as a (possible) pantheist is the only instance of

that label that I personally have found. Washington may have questioned some of the key doctrines of Christianity, or he may simply have been disinterested in organized religion at times, preferring instead to worship God in his own way and on his own time. It is clear, however, that he recognized the importance of religion and proper moral conduct to the well-being of society:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.

-Farewell Address, September 19, 1796.

Washington was clearly a believer in Divine intervention, which is definitely not a part of traditional Deism:

The hand of Providence has been so conspicuous in all this [the course of the Revolutionary War] that he must be worse than an infidel that lacks faith, and more wicked that has not gratitude to acknowledge his obligations...

-Letter to Brigadier General Thomas Nelson, August 20, 1778.

Washington also clearly believed in the necessity of prayer, which is another aspect not found in traditional Deism :

And now, Almighty Father, if it is Thy holy will that we shall obtain a place and name among the nations of the Earth, grant that we may be enabled to show our gratitude for Thy goodness by our endeavors to fear and obey Thee.

-Private prayer, 1779.

It has been said that Washington was never a church member, but there is documented proof that he was a member of the Truro Parish of the Anglican (Episcopal) Church, where he was a vestryman of the church and served as church warden. Washington's adopted daughter Nelly Custis²⁷ wrote to historian Jared Sparks in a letter dated February 26, 1833 expressing her conviction that Washington was a committed Christian.²⁸ Although Washington owned slaves, he was convinced of the God-given rights bestowed upon all people. Upon his death in 1799, Washington emancipated his slaves.

In summary, it can be said that Washington was a reserved man who was very private concerning his religious beliefs. Although he certainly would have been familiar with Deistic beliefs, and likely influenced by Deism to some degree, it seems clear that Washington held Christian beliefs in high regard and likely leaned more heavily toward orthodox Christianity than Deism.

JOHN ADAMS (1735-1826) Second President of the United States 1797-1801

John Adams was known as a great scholar who seriously studied not only the Bible but the classics of antiquity as well. Author John Eidsmoe states that although Thomas Jefferson was closed to the possibility of Divine revelation, Adams was open to both traditional Christianity and Enlightenment thinking.²⁹ Adams was raised a Congregationalist and later became associated with Unitarianism, which was certainly in line with his dual interest in both Christian theology and Enlightenment philosophy. He was known to attend churches of various denominations. Deism was very influential at Harvard during the time that Adams was enrolled, and Deism meshed well with Unitarian beliefs: Unitarianism stressed an emphasis on reasoning and was less concerned with Divine revelation, although neither Adams nor the Unitarian denomination of the time outright rejected Divine revelation. Both Unitarianism and Deism rejected belief in the Trinity, however. Adams is believed by some to have rejected both the Divinity of Jesus and Divine intervention,

although this is a matter of great contention and vigorous debate. Christian scholar John Eidsmoe admits that later in life Adams did seem to question basic Christian doctrines.³⁰ Adams always considered himself a Christian despite these reservations, and he strongly believed that organized religion was good for society because of the moral values that religion perpetuates:

Suppose a nation in some distant region should take the Bible for their only law book, and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there exhibited! Every member would be obliged in conscience, to temperance, frugality, and industry; to justice, kindness, and charity towards his fellow men; and to piety, love, and reverence toward Almighty God...What a Eutopia, what a Paradise would this region be.

-Diary entry for February 22, 1756.

Statesman, my dear Sir, may plan and speculate for liberty, but it is Religion and Morality alone, which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand. The only foundation for a free Constitution is pure virtue, and if this cannot be inspired into our people in a greater measure, than they have it now, they may change their rules and the form of government, but they will not obtain a lasting liberty.

-In correspondence to his grandson Charles Francis Adams, June 21, 1776.

Likewise Adams disagreed with the anti-Christian approach of Thomas Paine, feeling that Christianity was an invaluable part of American society:

The Christian religion is, above all the religions that ever prevailed or existed in ancient or modern times, the religion of wisdom, virtue, equity and humanity, let the Blackguard Paine say what he will.

-THE WORKS OF JOHN ADAMS, VOLUME III (1854), page 421. As based on the diary entry for July 26, 1796.

This is one example demonstrating that even some who were influenced by Enlightenment thinking found it necessary to separate themselves from the anti-Christian Deists. This may have been for political reasons as well as personal sensitivities.

In summary, it may be said that Adams was a Freethinker who entertained both traditional Christian theology and Enlightenment philosophy, eventually finding comfort in Unitarianism. It must be noted, however, that Adams was known to attend orthodox Christian services and seemingly found spiritual comfort in those worship services as well. Adams had great respect for the Jewish and Christian scriptures, and also had great respect for Christ – although his position on Jesus was unclear. Adams seemed to believe in the Divinity of Jesus as a young man, but had increasing doubts as he became older. This would seem to indicate the influence of Deism. To call Adams a Deist, however, is clearly an assumption. Perhaps he may be labeled a Christian Deist, but I prefer to classify him as a Freethinker who “took it all in” and considered many points of view.

THOMAS JEFFERSON (1743-1826)
Third President of the United States 1801-1809

What do you get when you cross an Anglican/Episcopalian, a Deist, a Unitarian, an Enlightenment philosopher, a Christian theologian, a skeptic of organized religion, one who appreciates a good sermon and a humanist? The answer is Thomas Jefferson, unique among the Founding Fathers in terms of personal theology:

I am of a sect [belief system] by myself, as far as I know.

-JEFFERSON'S RELIGIOUS BELIEFS by Rebecca Bowman. Found at www.monticello.org/reports/interests/religion.html

Jon Meacham, the editor of *Newsweek* and the author of **AMERICAN GOSPEL: GOD, THE FOUNDING FATHERS, AND THE MAKING OF A NATION**, summarizes Jefferson's religious beliefs:

Neither conventionally devout nor wholly unbelieving, Jefferson surveyed and staked out an American middle ground between the ferocity of evangelizing Christians on one side and the contempt for religion of secular philosophes on the other. The right would like Jefferson to be a soldier of faith, the left an American Voltaire. He was, depending on the moment, both and neither; he was, in other words, a lot like many of us.

-AMERICAN GOSPEL: GOD, THE FOUNDING FATHERS, AND THE MAKING OF A NATION by Jon Meacham (2006), p. 4.

What is often not known is that Jefferson served as the president of the American Philosophical Society from 1797-1815³¹, which was before, during and after his two consecutive terms as President of the United States. Jefferson had been raised an Anglican/Episcopalian, and he always had the greatest respect for Jesus but only as a great teacher of morals – not as God incarnate. Jefferson held to Deist and Unitarian beliefs; he had been quoted as saying that he someday believed that every American would be a Unitarian.

Author Glenn Sunshine sheds further light on the philosophical and religious leanings of Jefferson:

There is no question that Enlightenment thought – particularly John Locke's political thought – influenced the founders. And some of them were heavily influenced by deism. Probably the most broadly influenced was Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson went as far as to take a pair of scissors and cut out of the Bible everything he found unreasonable, including all cases of supernatural intervention. He then read the rest for inspiration. At the same time, however, he considered himself a Christian and expressed concerns about divine judgment on the nation – something a consistent deist wouldn't have done since God does not intervene in the world. Overall, however, in terms of worldview, there is little question that Jefferson leaned heavily toward deism. On the other hand, though he was the primary author of the Declaration of Independence, he was in Europe during the Constitutional Convention and the passing of the Bill of Rights, so his views are hardly relevant to those documents.

-WHY YOU THINK THE WAY YOU DO by Glenn Sunshine (2009), pp. 150-151.

Although Jefferson held membership in the Church of England (Anglican Church), which was the state church of Virginia, he did not refer to himself as an Anglican or any other type of Protestant. He did, however, attend Episcopalian services often (not weekly) throughout his adult life. On the other hand, Jefferson never referred to himself as a Deist or a Unitarian, although he clearly subscribed to many of their teachings.³² Many Christians claim Jefferson as one of their own, as do Deists, Unitarians and even secular humanists. It is proper to label Jefferson a humanist only if using the strict definition of the term. Humanism simply refers to the belief that human beings are of great worth and capability. Some early Christians such as Isaac Newton³³ and John Milton³⁴ referred to themselves as humanists, and there are those today who refer to themselves as Christian humanists, but the common vernacular has changed enough over time that most people today regard humanism and secular humanism (generally atheism and agnosticism) as being one and the same. Jefferson was certainly no atheist or agnostic, however:

God who gave us life, gave us liberty. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that

these liberties are of the Gift of God?

-NOTES ON THE STATE OF VIRGINIA, 1781.

In the summer of 1826, an 83 year old Jefferson read both the works of the ancient Greek philosophers and the Bible, which was keeping in line with his lifelong exploration of both secular and sacred ideas. Jefferson died shortly thereafter and was given a traditional Christian funeral, with his friend the Reverend Frederick Hatch presiding over the service. Unlike George Washington and James Madison who were difficult to label in large part because they offered little in the way of writings which discussed religion, Jefferson wrote fairly frequently about his beliefs to his friends. Jefferson was clearly a Freethinker if ever there was one, but he was careful in expressing his views in public as he was suspected of holding unorthodox views – which he did from a Christian perspective – and found it best to keep his views private for political reasons. He had learned a difficult lesson during his run for the presidency against John Adams in 1800. Jefferson's religious beliefs had been called into question by several of Adams' supporters.³⁵ From that time on, Jefferson was guarded in openly discussing in public his religious views.

Jefferson had given instructions to note only three accomplishments on his tombstone: The founding of the University of Virginia and authorship of both the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia statute for religious freedom. The university represented his lifelong love for learning, the Declaration of Independence his concern for freedom and human rights, and the Virginia statute for religious freedom his desire that all people have the right to worship as they choose, without interference from government or any religious governing body. Despite the controversies that often surround Jefferson, this is how we should remember him.

In summary, Jefferson was the epitome of Freethought: He was his "own sect", in his words, and combined belief systems to suit his personal theology. Those belief systems which formed his thinking consisted primarily of a combination of Deism and Unitarianism. More than the other Founding Fathers, Jefferson could be labeled as a Deist without much dispute.

JAMES MADISON (1751-1836) Fourth President of the United States 1809-1817

James Madison is known as the "Father of the Constitution." He was the youngest delegate to the Continental Congress, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, a member of the Constitutional Convention, the main author of the Bill of Rights, the Secretary of State and chief advisor to President Jefferson, a two-term President of the United States who served as Commander-in-Chief for the War of 1812, and the Rector of the University of Virginia. Like George Washington, Madison tended to be private concerning religious matters, but like many of his contemporaries he seemed to be well aware of Deistic thought. At 21 days old he was baptized in the Episcopal Church, in which his father was a lay leader. Madison was raised in the Episcopalian denomination³⁶ but is considered to have called into question his Christian views as he aged. Although Madison spoke of the guiding power of God, he used the Deistic terms for God common in his day:

We have all been encouraged to feel in the guardianship and guidance of that Almighty Being, whose power regulates the destiny of nations.

-Inaugural Address on March 4, 1809.

Madison was considered by some of his contemporaries to be harsh toward organized Christianity:

Ecclesiastical establishments tend to great ignorance and corruption, all of which facilitate the execution of mischievous projects.

-Letter from James Madison to William Bradford, Jr. dated January 1774.

However difficult it is to religiously label Madison, it is clear that he was a strong proponent of the separation between church and state:

...Freedom arises from the multiplicity of sects, which prevades America and which is the best and only security for religious liberty in any society. For where there is such a variety of sects, there cannot be a majority of any one sect to oppress and persecute the rest.

-James Madison speaking at the Virginia convention on ratifying the Constitution, June 1778.

The experience of the United States is a happy disproof of the error so long rooted in the unenlightened minds of well-meaning Christians, as well as in the corrupt hearts of persecuting usurpers, that without a legal incorporation of religious and civil polity, neither could be supported. A mutual independence is found most friendly to practical Religion, to social harmony, and to political prosperity.

-Letter from James Madison to F.L. Schaeffer dated December 3, 1821.

In summary, Madison was very private concerning his religious beliefs, which was not unusual for a politician in his era. He seemed to avoid using strong Christian terminology, and was reluctant to officially proclaim a day of prayer on two separation occasions – although he eventually did so both times.³⁷ Franklin Steiner, in his book **THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF OUR PRESIDENTS**, lists Madison in Chapter VI: Presidents Whose Religious Views Are Doubtful. Although often labeled a Deist, which he may very well have been, it might be best to say that Madison was convinced of the necessity of separation between church and state and believed that religious beliefs are best kept private.

**JAMES MONROE (1758-1831)
Fifth President of the United States 1817-1825**

James Monroe left little in the way of writings regarding his views on religion. No personal letters survived which could have precisely revealed his religious viewpoints, and no family or friends had written any (surviving) letters which may have given us clues. Monroe was raised in the Church of England, which had been the state church of Virginia, and as an adult he attended Episcopalian churches – specifically Saint John's Episcopal Church while he was President of the United States. Monroe is sometimes referred to as a Deist, since he occasionally used Deistic terms when referring to God and also because there are no records that he ever received Communion, but neither of these should be surprising. Deism had been such a strong influence in America for so long that many people used Deistic terms for God, and no Communion record may simply be an argument from a lack of evidence. Since Monroe frequently attended Episcopalian services, and was not critical of the clergy as was Thomas Jefferson and (to an extent) James Madison, he was never criticized for being a Deist. Franklin Steiner, in **THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF OUR PRESIDENTS**, also categorized Monroe as a president whose religious views are doubtful.

Monroe was definitely well-versed in Deistic thought as he was a close friend of Thomas Paine. Paine lived in Monroe's home in Paris during part of the time that Monroe served as minister to France. Paine had gone to France to assist in the French Revolution. Monroe, who had been impressed by Paine's writings, undoubtedly had conversations with Paine concerning Deism and Christianity. Arrested on contrived charges during the French Reign of Terror, Paine was released from prison in Paris through Monroe's efforts. In bad health as a result of his prison stay, the Monroes took Paine into their home in Paris for two years in order to restore his health. Paine wrote much or all of **THE AGE OF REASON** while in France.³⁸ Besides the Deistic influence of Paine, Monroe had been a close friend of Thomas Jefferson, who seemed always

willing to discuss God and religion with his close friends. Although neither of these close friendships is proof that Monroe himself was a committed Deist, it is certain that Monroe believed in the Creator of the universe and the power of prayer:

The liberty, prosperity, and happiness of our country will always be the object of my most fervent prayer to the Supreme Author of All Good.

-Second Inaugural Address on March 5, 1821.

In summary, Monroe is also difficult to clearly label regarding his religious views. He may have been strongly Deistic in his thinking, which would not be surprising in light of his close friendships with Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. He also used Deistic terms for God, without (recorded) references to Christ. Monroe did, however, attend Episcopalian services on a regular basis. Deists and Bible skeptics often state that church attendance was common even among Deists in that day, as they also served to solidify political-social connections. In short, Monroe was like other key figures in the founding of this nation: Private and guarded concerning his religious views and influenced by the rationalism of Enlightenment philosophy.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (1706-1790) Founding Father and American Renaissance Man

If I could go back in time and discuss God and spiritual issues with famous people throughout history, Benjamin Franklin would definitely be in my top ten list. Franklin was a true Renaissance man, having excelled as a scientist, inventor, philosopher, statesman, author and printer-publisher. He was always ahead of his time, having developed ideas on biological evolution well before Charles Darwin's 1859 publication **ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES**; subscribing to the possibility that advanced beings populated numerous planets well before H.G. Wells and the science fiction genre of modern times; and believing strongly in the possibility of reincarnation well before Eastern mysticism became rooted in America. As much as anyone, he would be very interesting due to his unorthodox beliefs and Freethinking manner. All the resources that I consulted state that Franklin was a Deist; not an anti-Christian Deist in the manner of Thomas Paine, but a confirmed Deist nonetheless:

Franklin, who normally preferred to contemplate the eternal in the privacy of his own home, had been invited by Jedediah Andrews to become a member of the Presbyterian church. He attended for five Sundays in a row. He became a pew holder and a contributor, but he nevertheless ceased to attend weekly services...In general, most Franklin scholars have found him to be quite moderate in his attitude toward religion. Typically, Alfred Owen Aldridge has described Franklin as a confirmed Deist, who, in contrast to more militant Deists like Tom Paine, did not attempt to "wither Christianity by ridicule or bludgeon it to death by argument."

-THE RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION OF FOUNDING FATHER BENJAMIN FRANKLIN. Found at www.adherents.com/people/pf/Benjamin_Franklin.html

Franklin's father Josiah had been either a Congregationalist or a Presbyterian (accounts vary). Franklin stated in his autobiography that he had been religiously educated as a Presbyterian, yet scholars label him a Deist in his adult life. In his younger years he even strongly entertained a belief in "the gods" (Polytheism) as well as no God (Atheism). Franklin did refer to himself as a Deist at one point in his teen years. Like most Freethinkers of his time he changed his views on spiritual matters throughout the course of his lifetime:

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), was reared in the Calvinism of the Presbyterian Church but, as a youth working in his brother's printshop, he saw some anti-deist literature which had the opposite effect on Franklin. Franklin said that he briefly became a "thorough

deist" but, at age 19, he adopted a materialistic philosophy. Franklin then returned to the Presbyterian Church, in Philadelphia, but he ceased attending this church when Franklin was 22 years of age. Then Franklin wrote his own "Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion" returning to his deistic views of religion. Near the end of his life, Franklin wrote, "I believe in one God, Creator of the Universe. That he governs it by his Providence. That he ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable Service we render him is doing good to his other Children. That the soul of Man is immortal, and will be treated with Justice in another Life respecting its Conduct in this. These I take to be the fundamental Principles of all sound Religion..." Franklin's deism is apparent in this statement, but there is no agreement among deists that the soul is immortal.

-HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN DEISM by John Lindell. Found at www.christiandeistfellowship.com/histdeism.htm

His parents hoped that young Benjamin would someday study for and enter into Christian ministry, but they did not have the resources to educate him properly for the ministry and therefore the plan was eventually laid to rest. Despite his Deistic leanings, however, Franklin believed in the power of prayer:

In this situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when present to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understandings?...I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth – that God governs in the affairs of men.

-MIRACLE AT PHILADELPHIA: THE STORY OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION, MAY TO SEPTEMBER 1787 by Catherine Drinker Bowen (1966), pp. 125-126.

Unlike traditional Deists, Franklin believed in Divine intervention:

I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth – that God governs in the affairs of men, and if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?

-Constitutional Convention, June 28, 1787.

Concerning Jesus, Franklin held the belief that Jesus had been a great teacher of wisdom and morals, but was not Divine – a view consistent with traditional Deism. The following quote is from a letter that Franklin wrote to Yale president Ezra Stiles in early 1790. Stiles had requested that Franklin share his views on religious matters:

As to Jesus of Nazareth, my Opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think the System of Morals and his Religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupt changes, and I have, with most of the present Dissenters in England, some Doubts as to his divinity; tho' it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and I think it needless to busy myself with it now, when I expect soon an Opportunity of knowing the Truth with less Trouble..."

-BENJAMIN FRANKLIN by Carl Van Doren (1938), p. 777.

Just over a month later, on April 17, 1790, Franklin was able to learn the truth about Jesus when he passed from this world.

Accused by some of having been an occultist, Franklin likely did have knowledge of occult topics due to his interest in Masonic literature, which explores the ancient mystery religions of Egypt, Babylon, Greece, etc., but that does not mean that he practiced occultism in any way or took

occult beliefs to heart. In light of his high regard for the moral teachings of Jesus, I doubt that he had been a confirmed occultist – occultists generally have a very low opinion of Christ, which was the opposite of Franklin.

Franklin had always been a staunch advocate of the effort to abolish slavery, a great moral cause that united many Christians and Deists. His belief in the evil of slavery was in line with his Deistic and Judeo-Christian belief in the equality of all people.

In summary, Franklin was like many other key Founding Fathers: Diverse, Freethinking and difficult to define in terms of worldview. Christians would like to claim him as one of their own, Deists do claim him as one of their own, occultists claim he was their representative Founding Father, and humanists claim him as their early American spokesman. That's the sign of a diverse thinker: Being claimed by so many different groups.

THE "ANTI-CHRISTIAN" DEISTS

The anti-Christian Deists were those men who strived to promote Deistic thought throughout America. They viewed Christianity and organized religion in general as being an insult to the rational mind and a cause of social unrest.

THOMAS PAINE (1737-1809)

Thomas Paine is considered by most to be the preeminent American Deist. His book **COMMON SENSE** (1776) was a popular appeal to the citizens of America to exert its independence from Great Britain. Widely read, this book inspired many in the cause for national independence and is why Paine should be numbered among the Founding Fathers. However, his later book **THE AGE OF REASON** (1794), his anti-Christian/pro-Deist treatise, was not nearly as well received by the general population of the day – nor is it well received within Christianity today for that matter. Benjamin Franklin warned Paine that America was not ready to receive such an attack on Christianity, yet Paine proceeded to publish the book anyway. Paine became so notorious as a result of **THE AGE OF REASON** that only six people attended his funeral. Paine is one of the most famous Deists in history, however, and his writings are highly regarded today by historians and philosophers.

ETHAN ALLEN (1738-1789)

The famous Revolutionary War hero Ethan Allen published his anti-Christian treatise **REASON: THE ONLY ORACLE OF MAN** in 1785, which he co-wrote with Dr. Thomas Young. In the same manner as Paine's **THE AGE OF REASON**, Allen and Young attacked the Bible, the established churches and the clergy, instead promoting Deistic thought and, according to some, the additional mixture of Pantheism and Transcendentalism, both of which would later be built upon by writer and one-time Unitarian pastor Ralph Waldo Emerson (see section titled **UNITARIANISM AND DEISM**).

THOMAS YOUNG (1731-1777)

Dr. Thomas Young, a prominent physician and patriot during the American Revolution, was the man responsible for introducing Ethan Allen to Deism. Known for his political and medical articles, he was the first clearly identified Deist in America to publish a Deist creed. As mentioned, Young co-wrote **REASON: THE ONLY ORACLE OF MAN** with Ethan Allen; it is believed that Young was responsible for much of the groundwork for the book. This was the first book on Deism that was published in America.

ELIHU PALMER (1764-1806)

Elihu Palmer converted to Deism soon after graduating from his ministerial studies; he had

originally planned to become a Presbyterian minister. He eventually found his way to New York City where he formed the Deistical Society of New York in 1796. Five years later he published his treatise on religion titled **THE PRINCIPLES OF NATURE, OR A DEVELOPMENT OF THE MORAL CAUSES OF HAPPINESS AND MISERY AMONG THE HUMAN SPECIES** (1801). He also founded two newspapers, *The Temple of Reason* (1800) and *Prospect, or View of the Moral World* (1803), both promoting Deistic thought.

Most of the influential leaders before and during American Independence were well versed in Deism, but it appears that only a relatively small number were anti-Christian Deists. Those who were influenced by Deism but were not militant Deists, such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, still retained a deep respect for large portions of the Jewish and Christian scriptures and even allowed for the possibility of intervention by God. Paine, Allen, Young and Palmer, on the other hand, had little or no respect for the Bible and would not allow for Divine intervention. Although the influence of these four was significant, most of the influential leaders in early America remained Trinitarian Christians. It should be noted, however, that even among the traditional Deists their view of law and government was not in opposition to the view of law and government from a Christian perspective.

A SUMMARY OF KEY FOUNDING FATHERS

Below are two graphs summarizing the religious actions and beliefs of the first five U.S. presidents as well as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine and Samuel Adams. The graphs may be viewed in the 2007 article by Jim Peterson titled **THE REVOLUTION OF BELIEF: FOUNDING FATHERS, DEISTS, ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS, AND THE SPIRITUAL CONTEXT OF 18TH CENTURY AMERICA**³⁹ (highly recommended). The first five presidents are highlighted in yellow in the chart. Benjamin Franklin is included in the chart because of his great importance in the founding of America, Thomas Paine is representative of pure or traditional Deism while Samuel Adams represents orthodox Christianity. The first graph examines the religious actions of these men, while the second graph examines their religious beliefs:

	Communion	Confirmation	Attendance	Vocabulary
Washington	No	No	Yes	Mostly Deist
Adams	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Yes	Both
Jefferson	No	No	Yes	Deist
Madison	No	No	Yes	Deist
Monroe	No	No	Yes	Mostly Deist
Franklin	No	No	Yes	Deist
Paine	No	No	No	Deist
Adams, Samuel	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Yes	Orthodox

	Resurrection	Christ-Divinity	Trinity	Miracles
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Washington	?	?	?	?
Adams	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Jefferson	No	No	No	No
Madison	?	?	No	?
Monroe	?	?	?	?
Franklin	No	No	No	?
Paine	No	No	No	No
Adams, Samuel	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Based upon these two charts by Jim Peterson, George Washington is too difficult to clearly label, John Adams clearly held to the Unitarian beliefs of his day, Thomas Jefferson was a church-going Deist⁴⁰, both James Madison and James Monroe are difficult to label but were likely Christian Deists, Benjamin Franklin was a Christian Deist, Thomas Paine's status as a traditional Deist is clear and beyond question, and Samuel Adams' status as an orthodox Christian is likewise clear and beyond question. This data is in line with my other resources, and further demonstrates that the Founding Fathers tended to be a mix of orthodox Christians, Unitarian Christians (a minority), Christian Deists, and traditional Deists (also a minority).

THE WIVES AND DAUGHTERS OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS

The wives and daughters of the Founding Fathers tended to hold to orthodox Christian beliefs, and this even included those wives and daughters whose husbands were influenced by Deism. The following quote is from David Holmes, professor of Religious Studies at the College of William and Mary:

All of the first five presidents of the United States were influenced to a great extent by Deism. Of the ten wives and female children (natural or adopted) of these presidents, however, seven appear to have been orthodox [Trinitarian] Christians...

Of the three presidential wives or daughters who held unorthodox Christian views, one seems to have become orthodox in her last years. Yet even the remaining two were Unitarian Christians who believed in the divine mission, miracles, resurrection, and second coming of Jesus. Although significant exceptions existed here and there, the women associated with the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary generations were significantly more orthodox in religious belief than the men.

-THE FAITHS OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS by David Holmes (2006), p. 109.

Holmes goes on to list six probable reasons why the "Founding Wives and Daughters" were much less likely to embrace the Enlightenment philosophy of Deism which was so influential among their husbands and fathers. First, Deism spread throughout early America at essentially the same time that Freemasonry was introduced to America:

Like the Deists, the Masons taught a natural religion where the "Grand Architect" or "Architect of the Universe" was a God of nature identified with natural laws.

-THE FAITHS OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS by David Holmes (2006), p. 110.

Deistic ideas, although not required by Freemasonry, were reinforced in the Masonic lodges since Deism meshes well with Masonic beliefs. Since women were denied participation in Freemasonry, they lacked the constant exposure to Deistic thought that Freemasonry provided.

Second, during this time in early America women were barred from attending college, where Deism was spreading like wildfire. Although women read, and often read widely, they generally lacked the group exchange of ideas that was found in the college classroom. Therefore, women were once again denied exposure to an exchange of Deistic ideas.

Third, in early America women were no strangers to suffering, be it physical or emotional, and they needed a faith or worldview that would help them to effectively cope with their suffering. Deism, with its God of creation who does not intervene in the lives of people, could not offer them the comfort, guidance and assistance that Christ offers.

Fourth, Deism is a philosophy which is based purely upon reason, with no room for mystery. Women may sense more clearly than men that existence itself is a mystery, and therefore Deism may not appeal to them, instead appearing to be a dry, overly logical philosophy.

Fifth, women spent far more time with the children than did their husbands, and it was the job of the women to teach their children in both secular and religious matters. Since the women themselves had been taught by their mothers, and their mothers had been taught by their mothers and so on, the women had continuously been taught the Judeo-Christian tradition long dominant in Western culture. The only women who knew much about Deism were those who had the luxury of enough free time to read Enlightenment philosophy – which was probably not high on the list of free time hobbies – or those whose Deist husbands took the time to educate them about this worldview.

Finally, church was a place where women could socialize, and a family's habitual presence or absence had a significant effect on social standing as well. Deism, which is in opposition to basic Christian beliefs, did not satisfy these basic social needs.

It is likely that their steadfast commitment to Christ is what, at least in part, kept their husbands and fathers grounded to at least some of the orthodox beliefs of Christianity.

DEISM AMONG LATER PRESIDENTS

Two later U.S. Presidents – John Tyler and Abraham Lincoln – have been labeled as Deists by some historians and biographers. Neither man, especially Lincoln, was easily classified in terms of religious beliefs and affiliation.

JOHN TYLER (1790-1862) Tenth President of the United States

A strong supporter of religious tolerance and the separation of church and state, John Tyler was affiliated with the Episcopal church but his ideas on God and religion are believed by some to be more in line with Deism. Although Deism was on the decline among intellectuals at this time in American history, it was still a viable worldview. The following quote, from a letter dated July 10, 1843, sheds light on Tyler's embrace of religious diversity and his commitment to the freedom of religion:

The United States have adventured upon a great and noble experiment, which is believed to have been hazarded in the absence of all previous precedent – that of total separation of Church and State. No religious establishment by law exists among us. The conscience is left free from all restraint and each is permitted to worship his Maker after his own judgement. The offices of the Government are open alike to all. No tithes are levied to

support an established Hierarchy, nor is the fallible judgement of man set up as the sure and infallible creed of faith. The Mahomedan, if he will to come among us would have the privilege guaranteed to him by the constitution to worship according to the Koran; and the East Indian might erect a shrine to Brahma if it so pleased him. Such is the spirit of toleration inculcated by our political Institutions...The Hebrew persecuted and down trodden in other regions takes up his abode among us with none to make him afraid...and the Aegis of the Government is over him to defend and protect him. Such is the great experiment which we have tried, and such are the happy fruits which have resulted from it; our system of free government would be imperfect without it."

-THE RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION OF U.S. PRESIDENT JOHN TYLER. Found at www.adherentss.com/people/pt/John_Tyler.html

In summary, Tyler was affiliated with the Episcopalian church but is considered by some scholars to hold to a Deistic worldview. Ultimately it may only be safe to say that he was a strong supporter of the separation between church and state.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN (1809-1865) Sixteenth President of the United States

Of all the presidents, Washington, Jefferson, Madison and Lincoln are the four who are considered by many to be the most difficult to label in terms of worldview or religious affiliation, and Lincoln may very well be the most difficult of the four to classify. Jefferson, labeled as a Christian Deist by many scholars, left behind a fair amount of writings regarding his views on God and religion, but he was difficult to classify because he combined so many different viewpoints. Washington, either a Christian or a Christian Deist, left us with fewer writings regarding his thoughts on God and religion than did Jefferson. Like Washington, Madison also considered religious matters to be very personal and was even less interested in sharing his religious views than was Washington. Lincoln, on the other hand, was considered by some to be downright closed in terms of disclosing his thoughts on religion. The following quote from the Wikipedia article on Lincoln's religious beliefs is in line with other resources on the topic:

Abraham Lincoln's religious beliefs are a matter of controversy. Lincoln frequently referenced God and quoted the Bible, yet never formally joined any church. He was private about his beliefs and respected the beliefs of others. Since his assassination, many attempts have been made to define his beliefs as either religious or secular. He was said to be an admirer of the deist author Thomas Paine, and it has been reported that he wrote a manuscript essay challenging orthodox Christianity modeled on Paine's book The Age of Reason, which a friend burned to protect him from ridicule. According to biographer Reverend William Barton, Lincoln likely had written an essay something of this character, but it was not likely that it was burned in such a manner. While Lincoln never joined any church, there is disagreement about whether he experienced a conversion to Christianity later in life, particularly during his tenure as president. His close personal friend, bodyguard, and biographer Ward Hill Lamon said:

Mr. Lincoln did not, to my knowledge, in any way change his religious ideas, opinions or beliefs, from the time he left Springfield till the day of his death. I do not know just what they were, never having heard him explain them in detail, but I am very sure he gave no outward indications of his mind having undergone any change in that regard while here.

-ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND RELIGION. Found at www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Lincoln_and_religion

Lincoln's widow, who surely knew him better than anyone, wrote a different opinion concerning his religious beliefs:

...As my husband was known to be the most loving and devoted husband and father we

will allow these falsehoods a place where they deserve. We all – the whole world have been greatly shocked – at the fearful ideas – Herndon – has advanced regarding Mr. Lincoln's religious views. You, who knew him so well and held so many conversations with him, as far back as twenty years since, know what they were. A man, who never took the name of the Maker in vain, who always read his Bible diligently, who never failed to rely on God's promises and looked upon Him for protection, surely such a man as this, could not have been a disbeliever, or any other than what he was, a true Christian gentleman. No one, but such a man as Herndon could venture – to suggest such an idea. From the time of the death of our little Edward, I believe my husband's heart was directed towards religion and as time passed on – when Mr. Lincoln became elevated to Office – with the care of a great Nation, upon his shoulders – when devastating war was upon us then indeed to my knowledge – did his great heart go up daily, hourly, in prayer to God – for his sustaining power. When too – the overwhelming sorrow came upon us, our beautiful bright angelic boy, Willie was called away from us, to his Heavenly Home, with God's chastising hand upon us – he turned his heart to Christ.”

-ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND RELIGION. Found at www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Lincoln_and_religion

Of course some will say that Lincoln's widow wanted to portray her late husband as a Christian since that was the socially accepted religion of the time, but that is an assumption based on speculation and we should give her the benefit of the doubt.

Although Lincoln was even labeled as being an Atheist by some, there is no reason to believe such an accusation:

It is the duty of nations as well as of men to owe their dependence on the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow yet with assured mercy and pardon, and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.

-Proclamation, March 30, 1863.

Lincoln was most likely a Christian who was influenced by Deism, as he held Thomas Paine's **THE AGE OF REASON** in high regard, or possibly he was a Christian Deist but certainly there is no case for Lincoln holding to an Atheistic worldview. His references to God and his obvious spiritual strength make this an absurd claim. Whether a Christian or a Christian Deist, it is plain that Lincoln believed in the guiding power of God:

That the Almighty does make use of human agencies, and directly intervenes in human affairs, is one of the plainest statements of the Bible. I have had so many evidences of his direction – so many instances when I have been controlled by some other power than my own will – that I cannot doubt that this power comes from above.

-Correspondence to L.E. Chittendon, 1865.

The following humorous quote is of special interest to those of us here in Galesburg, Illinois – not only is Galesburg in the “Land of Lincoln” and the home of the only remaining Lincoln-Douglas Debate site (Knox College) but Galesburg is also the birthplace and early residence of poet Carl Sandburg:

In 1846, when Lincoln ran for congress against Peter Cartwright, the noted evangelist, Cartwright tried to make Lincoln's religion or lack of it a major issue of the campaign. Responding to accusations that he was an "infidel", Lincoln defended himself, without denying that specific charge, by publishing a hand-bill in which he stated:

“That I am not a member of any Christian church is true; but I have never denied the truth

of the Scriptures; and I have never spoken with intentional disrespect of religion in general, or of any denomination of Christians in particular...I do not think I could myself be brought to support a man for office whom I knew to be an open enemy of, or scoffer at, religion."

As Carl Sandburg recounts in *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years*, Lincoln attended one of Cartwright's revival meetings. At the conclusion of the service, the fiery pulpiteer called for all who intended to go to heaven to rise. Naturally, the response was heartening. Then he called for all those who wished to go to hell to stand, unsurprisingly there were not many takers. Lincoln had responded to neither option. Cartwright closed in. "Mr. Lincoln, you have not expressed an interest in going to either heaven or hell. May I enquire as to where you do plan to go?" Lincoln replied: "I did not come here with the idea of being singled out, but since you ask, I will reply with equal candor. I intend to go to Congress."

-ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND RELIGION. Found at www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Lincoln_and_religion

Lincoln is believed to have been deeply interested in psychic phenomena and to have had some involvement in spiritism, which is contacting the dead – often through séances. Dr. Susan Martinez describes Lincoln:

Poet and jokester, mime and orator, humanist and freethinker (the only U.S. president never to join a church); bookworm and seeker, clog-dancer and railsplitter extraordinaire...

-LINCOLN AND THE AFTERLIFE by Susan Martinez in *Atlantis Rising*, May/June 2008, p. 43.

Lincoln could only be described as a humanist in the strict sense of the word (see the above section titled **THOMAS JEFFERSON**). Like many of the early presidents decades before him, Lincoln was difficult to label because he was truly a Freethinker.

In summary, Lincoln is really impossible to clearly label. He obviously believed in God and he had a strong spiritual sense, but he cannot be labeled an orthodox Christian even though it is clear that he held the moral teachings of the Bible in high regard. He also held Thomas Paine's **THE AGE OF REASON** in high regard and likely doubted at least some Christian doctrines because of that influence. He may have had a very strong interest in occult matters as well. All we can say for sure is that he was a multi-faceted Freethinker who was easily one of our greatest presidents regardless of his religious worldview.

THE FOUNDING FATHERS: ANYTHING BUT GODLESS

The majority of the Founding Fathers are not discussed in this short paper, but it is clear that most tended to hold orthodox Christian beliefs.⁴¹ Some of the key leaders, specifically the first five presidents and Benjamin Franklin, were clearly influenced by Deism yet still relied upon the wisdom and moral teachings found in the Bible. Author and worldview scholar Glenn Sunshine is convinced that only a small percentage of the Founding Fathers were pure or traditional Deists:

In fact, only a very small minority of the two hundred or so people considered to be founding fathers in America could be fairly described as deists or free thinkers.

The rest [after discussing Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and George Washington] belonged to a variety of orthodox churches – Congregational, Presbyterian, Anglican, Baptist, and others (though some of the founders who were members of these churches had somewhat unorthodox views). Many were ministers or had earned divinity degrees.

And if you take the time to read what they wrote, both for public and private audiences, it is clear that they thought they were establishing a government based on biblical principles, including the ideas of inalienable rights (which had roots in medieval theology) enshrined in both the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, limitations on the reach of the federal government to the enumerated powers in the Constitution, and checks and balances within the government to prevent human sinfulness from corrupting the government, even representative government (which they saw as being rooted in Jethro's advice to Moses in EXODUS 18). To be sure, they rarely cited chapter and verse from Scripture in their political discussions, but their priorities and overall approach to government were firmly grounded in a Christian worldview.

-WHY YOU THINK THE WAY YOU DO by Glenn Sunshine (2009), pp. 151-152.

Although some have promoted the idea that the Founding Fathers were Godless, nothing could be further from the truth. The following quotes are only a small number of examples demonstrating that most of our Founding Fathers held Christ and Christian morality in the highest regard, and relied upon Divine intercession:

Last and not least they cherished a great hope and inward zeal of laying good foundations, or at least making some ways toward it, for the propagation and advance of the gospel of the Kingdom of Christ in the remote parts of the world, even though they should be but stepping stones to others in the performance of so great a work.

-William Bradford, Governor of Plymouth Colony, in Plymouth Plantation, 1647.

Whether this will prove a blessing or a curse, will depend upon the use our people make of the blessings, which a gracious God hath bestowed on us. If they are wise, they will be great and happy. If they are of a contrary character, they will be miserable. Righteousness alone can exalt them as a nation. Reader! Whoever thou art, remember this, and in thy sphere practice virtue thyself, and encourage it in others.

-Patrick Henry, member of the Continental Congress, from the Back of Stamp Act Resolves, May 1765.

The rights of the colonists as Christians...may be best understood by reading and carefully studying the institution of The Great Law Giver and Head of the Christian Church, which are to be found clearly written and promulgated in the New Testament.

-Samuel Adams, cousin to John Adams who is often referred to as "The Father of the American Revolution", from The Rights of Colonists, 1772.

We consider that we are all embarked in (the same boat) and must sink or swim together...Let us all be of one heart, and stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. And may he, of His infinite mercy, grant us deliverance of all our troubles.

-William Prescott, Commander of the Colonial Militia at Bunker Hill, in a letter to the citizens of Boston under British blockade in 1774.

In circumstances dark as these, it becomes us, as men and Christians, to reflect that, whilst every prudent measure should be taken to ward off the impending judgments...all confidence must be withheld from the means we use; and reposed only on that God who rules in the Armies of heaven, and without whose blessing the best human counsels are but foolishness – and all created power vanity.

-John Hancock, signer of the Declaration of Independence, from the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts – Day of Public Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer, April 15, 1775.

While we give praise to God, the supreme disposer of all events for His interposition on our behalf, let us guard against the dangerous error of trusting in, or boasting of, an arm of flesh...

-John Witherspoon, President of the College of New Jersey (later called Princeton), in a speech at the college on May 17, 1776.

We have this day restored the Sovereign to Whom all men ought to be obedient. He reigns in heaven and from the rising to the setting of the sun, let his kingdom come.

-Samuel Adams on the signing of the Declaration of Independence, August 1776.

Forasmuch as it is the indispensable duty of all men to adore the superintending Providence of Almighty God, to acknowledge with gratitude their obligation to Him for benefits received and to implore such further blessing as they stand in need of; and it having pleased Him in His abundant mercy not only to continue to us the innumerable bounties of His common Providence...to smile upon us as in the prosecution of a just and necessary war for the defense and establishment of our unalienable rights and liberties...It is therefore recommended...to set apart Thursday, the 18th day of December next, for the solemn thanksgiving and praise.

-George Washington, November 1777. This order declaring the first National Proclamation of Thanksgiving was given soon after victory over British forces at Saratoga in October 1777.

Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.

-John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and the coauthor of the FEDERALIST PAPERS, in a private letter to Jedediah Morse, 1797.

Unto Him who is the author and giver of all good, I render sincere and humble thanks for His merciful and unmerited blessings, and especially for our redemption and salvation by His beloved son.

-John Jay's will.

Whenever the pillars of Christianity should be overthrown, our present republican forms of government, and all the blessings which flow from them, must fall with them.

-Jedediah Morse, educator and geographer, in his Election Sermon, 1799.

At this day, religious indulgence is one of our clearest duties, because it is one of our undisputed rights. While we rejoice that the principles of genuine Christianity have so far triumphed over the prejudices of a former generation, let us fervently hope for the day when it will prove equally victorious over the malignant passions of our own.

-John Quincy Adams, sixth President of the United States, during an oration at Plymouth, Massachusetts on December 22, 1802.

I have alternately been called an Aristocrat and a Democrat. I am neither. I am a Christocrat.

-Benjamin Rush, signer of the Declaration of Independence and the founder of the first

anti-slavery society in America, as quoted in his eulogy in 1813.

Finally, let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought hither by their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed by its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate its principles with the elements of their society, and to diffuse its influence through all their institutions, civil, political, or literary. Let us cherish these sentiments, and extend this influence still more widely; in full conviction that that is the happiest society which partakes in the highest degree of the mild and peaceful spirit of Christianity.

-Daniel Webster, diplomat and educator, in his December 22, 1820 speech at the bicentennial of the Pilgrims' landing at Plymouth Rock.

The neglect of public worship in this city is an increasing evil, and the indifference to all religion throughout the whole country portends no good. There is in the clergy of all the Christian denominations a time-serving, cringing, subservient morality, as wide from the spirit of the Gospel as it is from the intrepid assertion and vindication of truth. The counterfeit character of a very large portion of the Christian ministry of this country is disclosed in the dissensions growing up in all the Protestant churches on the subject of slavery. The abolitionists assume as the first principle of all their movements that slavery is sin. Their opponents, halting between the alternative of denying directly this position and of admitting the duty binding upon them to bear their own testimony against it, are prevaricating with their own consciences, and taxing their learning and ingenuity to prove that the Bible sanctions slavery; that Abraham, Isaac, and Paul were slaveholders; and that St. Paul is the apostle of man-stealers, because he sent Onesimus back to his master Philemon. These preachers of the Gospel might just as well call our extermination of the Indians an obedience to Divine commands because Jehovah commanded the children of Israel to exterminate the Canaanite nations.

-John Quincy Adams, sixth President of the United States, in his diary entry for May 27, 1838.

That book [the Bible], Sir, is the Rock upon which our Republic rests.

-Andrew Jackson, the seventh President of the United States, quoted June 8, 1845.

French statesman and historian Alexis De Tocqueville observed, and then wrote about, America. As a foreigner, he was considered an objective witness to the strong Christian character of the founders and citizens of America:

In the United States the sovereign authority is religious...there is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America, and there can be no greater proof of its utility and if its conformity to human nature than that its influence is powerfully felt over the most enlightened and free nation of the earth.

-Alexis de Tocqueville, 1831.

The Supreme Court examined thousands of documents concerning the founding of this nation over a ten year period (1882-1892). They came to the conclusion that America is a religious nation, with our laws based upon Judeo-Christian teachings:

There is no dissonance in these declarations. There is a universal language pervading them all, having one meaning. They affirm and reaffirm that this is a religious nation. These are not individual sayings, declarations of private persons. They are organic utterances. They speak the voice of the entire people...This is a religious people...This is a Christian nation.

-Decision in Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States, 1892.

I believe it is safe to say that America was a Christian nation at this time in terms of numbers, since the vast majority of Americans held to orthodox Christian beliefs, but America was not a Christian nation in the sense that Christianity was the official or state-federal mandated religion. Scripture was, however, of utmost importance to almost everyone. In a ten-year study undertaken at the University of Houston, over 15,000 documents from the Founding Fathers were studied. It was shown that 34 percent of the quotations came from the Bible, which was by far the single greatest influence upon the Founding Fathers. French political philosopher Montesquieu was quoted in 8.3 percent of the Founding Fathers writings. William Blackstone, whose law commentaries guided the Supreme Court for over a century, came in third at 7.9 percent. Blackstone's commentaries contained a great deal of scripture themselves, and because of that it may be said that the Bible is quoted in well over a third of the Founding Fathers writings.⁴²

WHAT ABOUT THE TREATY OF TRIPOLI?

Many Deists and secular humanists are quick to bring up Article 11 of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, better known simply as Article 11 of the Treaty of Tripoli, as proof that America was not founded as a Christian nation. They have a legitimate point which needs to be addressed.

The treaty was initiated in response to terrorist acts perpetrated by Muslim pirates (terrorists) against American vessels off the coast of North Africa (Barbary Coast region) during early post-Independence America. It is at this point that we need to look at Article 11 of the Treaty of Tripoli:

As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion – as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Musselmen [Muslims] – and as the said states never have entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mahometan [Muslim] nation, it is declared by the parties, that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.

-Article 11 of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary

It appears that this document is proof that America was not founded with the intention of being a nation dedicated to the worship of Christ alone. The text seems to indicate that not only has the United States government not been founded on Christian principles, but also points out that the United States government has no issue with Islam or any predominately Muslim nation.

What are we to make of this document? First of all, it depends upon your worldview. Deists and secular humanists embrace this document as being proof that America has secular roots, and Christians tend to get bent out of shape over it. A large percentage of Americans are unaware of its existence, and if made aware of it would likely be apathetic regarding its content. Before I give my view on the matter, let me address two points concerning Article 11. First, many Deists and secularists in general are eager to point out that this article confirms that George Washington was a Deist who had secular intentions for this nation. However, it is claimed, as based upon a copy of the treaty recently circulated, that Washington's signature is a fraud and that he never signed the document. John Adams, who did sign the document, did so after the Dey of Tripoli (Jussuf Bashaw Mahomet) signed the document, the Dey of Algiers (Hassan Bashaw) signed the document, the U.S. Minister to Portugal (David Humphreys) signed the document, and the United States Senate approved the document.

Second, consider the following quote:

Most extraordinary (and wholly unexplained) is the fact that Article 11 of the Barlow translation [Joel Barlow was the U.S. official in charge of the signing in Algiers] with its famous phrase, “the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion,” does not exist at all. There is no Article 11. The Arabic text which is between Articles 10 and 12 is in form a letter crude and flamboyant and withal quite unimportant, from the Dey of Algiers to the Pasha of Tripoli. How that script came to be written and to be regarded, as in the Barlow translation, as Article 11 of the treaty as there written, is a mystery and seemingly must remain so. Nothing in the diplomatic correspondence of the time throws any light whatever on the point.

-TREATIES AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, 1776-1949

Piracy continued despite the treaty, and America went to war with Tripoli in 1801. This was America’s first war against Islamic terrorists. While neither of these two points completely refutes secularist claims that America was founded upon non-Christian or secular ideals, it is important to consider these points.

I personally have no concern over Article 11. Even if Article 11 was intended to be as it appears, and was enthusiastically endorsed by Washington and Adams, I believe that it is not something that anyone should become frustrated over. I am convinced that the Founding Fathers were committed to founding a nation of religious liberty, not a nation dedicated to Christ. Most of the Founding Fathers were committed to Christ, but they also hated the concept of state religions (denominations) as found in Europe and were committed to avoiding that error in America by ensuring religious freedom for every citizen. Freedom means that we are free to choose, religiously and in all other ways. As far as the statement that America had no hostile intentions with any Islamic nation, that was true at the time that the treaty was developed. Early Americans were only seriously concerned with England and France; the nations of North Africa were not a concern for Americans until pirates from these nations committed acts of terrorism against Americans. Then we had problems.

FREEMASONRY AND DEISM

In addition to the claim by some that all of the Founding Fathers were Deists, another claim has been that all of the Founding Fathers were Freemasons as well. There is a loose connection between Deism, Freemasonry and the Founding Fathers. Although many of the Founding Fathers were Freemasons, many others were not. Among those who were Freemasons, some viewed God through a Deistic lens, but many others were Christians who believed in the Triune God.⁴³ Since Freemasonry only requires its members to believe in a Supreme Being, this is not an issue or problem in Freemasonry. Freemasonry is not a Deist-based organization where fellow Deists can gather together around a common belief, but rather many Deists throughout American history have been associated with Freemasonry and have been a welcome part of this fraternal organization:

Freemasonry and deism had some "reason-based" philosophical ties during the “Age of Enlightenment”, but American Freemasonry was not founded on deism...Deism has no church and no official organization, hence, it is not considered a religion any more than Freemasonry. One is a philosophical outlook and one is a fraternal organization with a civic mission. Deism is more a reason-based view of religion in general or perhaps it could be seen as a "religious philosophy". The attitudes of a deist might seem philosophically comfortable within a 1770 Freemasonry Lodge, but that connection was probably a product of Enlightenment ideals effecting Europe and America at the time. A Freemason is not required to have a specific religious outlook, and most deists were not Freemasons. The only link between the two is they both reflected reason-based Enlightenment thinking in the 18th century.

Deism had an influence among several important Founding Fathers. However, I think it's relatively safe to say that most colonial American Freemasons (and most Americans at large) were more typically orthodox Protestants of varying denominations and included much smaller religious minorities of Catholics and Jews. Deist-thinking Christians were in the minority at the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution signings, even though some of the biggest names linked with those documents would be both deists and Freemasons.

-FREEMASONRY IN 18TH CENTURY AMERICA by Jim Peterson. Found at www.earlyamericanhistory.net/freemasonry.htm

The article goes on to state that George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, James Monroe, John Hancock, 9-13 signers of the Constitution, at least nine signers of the Declaration of Independence, at least 33 of the 74 generals in the Colonial Army and several other recognizable names were all Freemasons.

Benjamin Franklin was a Master Mason who remained committed to Freemasonry until his death, but George Washington wrote to a friend in 1797 that he had not been inside a lodge more than once or twice in the past thirty years, so although Washington was technically a Freemason it seems that he was not a committed member.

Although Deism and Freemasonry shared some beliefs and values, not all Deists were Freemasons and vice versa, and the claim that all of the Founding Fathers were both Deists and Freemasons is a distortion of the facts. Freemasonry in some parts of Europe, particularly in France, was a "hotbed of radical thinking."⁴⁴ Although the American lodges tended to be more social than their European counterparts, they were often guilty by association with those more radical European lodges which were Freethinking centers concerned with politics and the opposition of absolutism. It should be noted, however, that some American Freemasons such as Franklin and possibly even Jefferson attended French lodges when they were in that nation.

Americans in the 18th century tended to join lodges for a variety of reasons: Fellowship and the opportunity for social activity, to forge political and business contacts, and to promote the good works and strong moral convictions of Freemasonry. They also had no television sets, radios, computers, automobiles or any number of other modern conveniences and "toys" that we today take for granted. Many joined simply for entertainment and to be part of something other than work and church activities.

UNITARIANISM AND DEISM

As previously mentioned, Unitarianism in early America was the Christian denomination that rejected belief in the Trinity, instead accepting the belief that God exists in the form of one person. Unitarianism in early America was much different than Unitarianism is today. Unitarians in early America held to the belief in the resurrection of Christ as well as all of the miracles found throughout scripture. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), who was a one-time Unitarian pastor in addition to being a great American writer, is credited with having brought Eastern religious beliefs and Transcendentalism to Unitarianism, drawing this denomination far from its Christian roots.⁴⁵ In 1961 Unitarianism joined together with Universalism, a similar denomination that rejected the concept of Hell and espoused the belief that all souls will be saved regardless of one's beliefs or actions. Unitarian Universalism today is a religion known for having adherents with a wide range of beliefs and practices, borrowing from religions and worldviews as diverse as Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Atheism, Pantheism and Deism. Deists who respect the wisdom found in the holy books of the world religions, but view these writings as nothing more than the sayings of wise teachers, are comfortable in the Unitarian Universalist setting. Since Deists also view God as existing in the form of one person, a natural connection exists between the two beliefs, with some Founding Fathers (notably Jefferson) associating themselves with both Deism and Unitarianism. In addition to the influence of Deist and Unitarian beliefs, some of the Founding Fathers were religious pluralists⁴⁶ although the vast majority of the Founding Fathers

were Christians who believed that Christ is “the way and the truth and the life” and they believed that “no one comes to the Father [God] except through me [Christ]” (**JOHN 14:6**).

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO DEISM

I understand the concern that Deists have over accepting matters on faith alone. We do need to utilize our God-given gift of reasoning and not just accept ideas because “that’s what I was always taught” or “because this person believes this, and that’s good enough for me”. I cringe when I hear these statements. However, Christianity is not a blind faith, but rather a well-reasoned faith – I say that while keeping in mind that some passages of scripture are unclear and require a lot of “digging.”

I believe in God because the evidence for Gods’ existence is all around me, speaking clearly to me through this incredibly complex creation (**ROMANS 1:20**). Deists are in full agreement on this point. However, unlike Deists I believe in the Trinitarian nature of God for two reasons: (1.) The Bible points clearly to God existing in three distinct persons, although all three persons are one in essence. No person can fully understand this concept, yet the Bible gives me enough evidence of Divine inspiration in other ways that I can accept this matter, especially in light of (2.) the obvious fact that God is way beyond our full comprehension. I cannot rule out the possibility that God exists in three distinct persons with all three being the same and only God just because it seems like an illogical concept. Just because I cannot wrap my mind around this concept, and because it seems illogical by normal human reasoning, does not mean that I must throw the idea out. God is, after all, infinite and beyond our understanding:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

-ISAIAH 55:8-9

People have said to me “How can you believe that $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$?” I realize that the answer to that equation is three, but maybe the equation is $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$. As is often the case, there might be another way to look at this teaching.

I have much respect for Deism – far more respect than most Christians would allow or admit to – but I keep coming back to one point in particular, and that is the evidence for Jesus being God. The evidence is too overwhelming for me to set Jesus aside. The “Case for Christ” is beyond the scope of this paper and may be explored in several very good books.⁴⁷ There is an organization known as “Jews for Jesus”, a Messianic Jewish group who acknowledges Christ as God and the Messiah promised in the Old Testament, but there can never be a “Deists for Jesus” organization in which the members acknowledge Jesus as God⁴⁸, for doing so would negate their basic Deistic beliefs. Many Deists have respect for Christ as a great moral teacher who sought to change the world, but Deists cannot allow for the Divinity of Jesus as that idea is just too contradictory to their core beliefs.

Although Jesus is the heart of the matter for me, many Deists focus on numerous passages of scripture that are unclear or just plain confusing. I readily admit that there are verses and whole passages of scripture that are difficult to accept at face value, but that does not mean that there are no satisfactory answers to these questions posed by Deists. For example, **I TIMOTHY 2:11-12** seems to clearly state that women are not allowed to teach men in the church setting and may not exercise authority over a man; in fact the text states that women must remain silent while in church. Is the Apostle Paul really saying that women can never, at any time or in any place, teach men concerning spiritual matters or exercise authority over men in the church, and that women must remain silent while in church? On the surface it would seem so, but if one digs deeper and probes the historical and cultural context of these verses as well as the entire text of **I**

TIMOTHY an explanation for these verses becomes clear. At this time in Ephesus, and throughout the Roman Empire as a whole, the Artemis cult was very dominant. In some areas the worship of Artemis⁴⁹ was essentially the state religion. The Artemis cult elevated women to a status above men, which is not surprising when considering that Artemis worship was a worship of the divine feminine, and as a result women exercised great power and status within the temples dedicated to Artemis. When Christianity swept through the Roman Empire, many who were formerly pagan⁵⁰ converted to Christianity, and certainly some of the women came from a background in Artemis worship and were used to exercising authority over men and speaking out in the worship setting whenever they felt so inclined. Within the church, however, the situation was different; women formerly linked to Artemis worship were now required to first learn about Christ and what he had taught before they could teach someone about Jesus themselves, and they could not do that unless they quieted themselves in order to learn, rather than being the experts they were when involved in Artemis worship. This was probably difficult for many of these former Artemis priestesses, and it is not at all unrealistic to believe that some of these women were interrupting the teaching within the church out of old habits. Therefore, Paul told Timothy that these women must remain silent, in order to learn, and cannot exercise authority over men as they were used to doing in their former temples. This explanation makes sense when we consider that Jesus was the greatest liberator of women in ancient Israel and Christian women in the New Testament had made great strides in achieving a more equal status, although in this very patriarchal culture there would never be true equality. Many such as I believe that the influence of Artemis worship is the key to properly understanding this difficult passage of scripture. That is just one example of how going beyond the surface reading and digging for an answer to a difficult and contentious passage of scripture can render insight into a matter. Surface readings of difficult passages can easily lead to erroneous beliefs.⁵¹

AN APPRECIATION FOR THE BIBLE

The historical and archaeological context of the Bible is often confirmed by scholars. Some archaeologists have even used the Bible as the key to preparing for archaeological expeditions. Some have said that the Bible is nothing more than Hebrew mythology, but the Bible has a proven track record in key areas of importance. In addition to accurate archaeological confirmation of Biblical history, both accurate scientific descriptions in advance of modern discoveries and prophetic fulfillment offer support that the Bible has an origin beyond the natural world. Mythologists and folklorists tell us that most mythology is based to some extent on fact. Although many of the mythologies of the ancient world are obviously embellished to the point that they cannot be considered anywhere near 100% true, keep in mind that many of them share common themes such as a Supreme Being who is responsible for creating everything, a worldwide flood in which one family survived in order to repopulate the world and a dispersion of people from a central location due to a "confusion of tongues" (different languages). Many mythologists and folklorists attribute these common themes to factual events from our deep past.⁵² We must ask the question "Are some of these mythologies more realistic than others?" or even "Does one mythology actually appear to be factual?" Just because other civilizations have given rise to embellished, wild stories does not mean that the Hebrews necessarily did the same – I say that with the full understanding that not everything in the Bible is easily understood or easy to accept at face value. We are nineteen centuries or more removed from the time of the original writings, not to mention that they come from a Near Eastern culture which is quite foreign to us in the West today. We must also keep in mind that the Biblical writers used poetic form and symbolism when it served to teach important ideas, and this poetry and symbolism – which has often been poorly understood by modern Western readers – does not automatically relegate the Bible to the status of mythology.

Many have said that the Bible is pre-scientific at best or unscientific at worst, but when the Bible addresses scientific matters it is accurate despite its great antiquity. The following examples illustrate scientific accuracy centuries or millennia prior to modern scientific confirmation:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

-GENESIS 1:1

All ancient cultures with the exception of the Hebrews believed the universe to be eternal – in other words, most ancient cultures believed that the universe had always existed and was without a beginning. Only in the first half of the 20th century did scientists begin to recognize that time, space and matter came into existence at a particular point in time. Even Albert Einstein found the concept of a beginning for the universe difficult to accept when first presented with the evidence, but even he had to eventually accept the fact that this universe is not eternal – a concept that the ancient Hebrews understood fully for three millennia.

He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth.

-ISAIAH 40:22

The earth was believed to be flat in many if not most cultures of ancient history, yet the Bible has always described a spherical earth.

He suspends the earth over nothing.

-JOB 26:7

The earth is suspended by gravity in space, a fact not accurately described by science until relatively modern times. Some of the ancient cosmologies had Atlas holding the world on his shoulders (Greek), or the earth resting on the backs of giant elephants, themselves standing on the back of a giant turtle (Hindu). The law of gravity exerting itself between solar bodies is something that the ancient Hebrews were clearly aware of.

He stretches out the heavens like a tent.

-PSALM 104:2

The universe is expanding, as demonstrated by cosmologists and astrophysicists in the early 20th century. Ancient cultures other than the Hebrews did not consider the concept of an expanding universe.

Star differs from star in splendor.

-I CORINTHIANS 15:41

All stars were believed to be identical among many cultures both ancient and even relatively modern, yet the Bible points out the truth that stars exist in differing sizes and luminosities.

This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high.

-GENESIS 6:15

Interestingly, a length-to-width ratio of 3:1 is perfect for ship stability, even in the worst of conditions. Many modern ships have been built on this ratio. Whether one believes the account of Noah's ark is irrelevant concerning this point: The fact is that the Hebrews, not known through history as being great shipbuilders, were aware of the ideal length-to-width ratio for ship design.

Fulfilled prophecy, however, is what really awes many and demonstrates that the scriptures originate from beyond this world. The Old Testament Messianic prophecies were fully realized in the person of Jesus Christ, and the amazing prophetic fulfillment of the Jews returning to their ancestral homeland after nineteen centuries of dispersal are enough to catch anyone's attention.

Do I understand all passages of scripture? No. Are some of the Biblical stories difficult to accept? Yes. Does that mean that the Bible is not the inspired words of God? No. I do not have to understand everything perfectly to accept the Bible as having Divine origin.⁵³ There is enough evidence for me that I do not need to deny a belief in the reliability of the Bible because I lack a complete understanding of it. I do not believe that we need to, or even should, hold to a literal understanding of every verse or passage of scripture since we have (1.) the time factor, (2.) the cultural factor, (3.) the poetic, allegorical and symbolic factor and (4.) the modern translation (language) factor. Skeptics should closely consider these crucial factors. This is a topic that is well beyond the scope of this paper and best left to other resources.⁵⁴

THE VERY REAL CHALLENGE OF DEISM

Deism is considered to have begun its decline in America around the beginning of the 19th century, although many of the key leaders in American Independence who were influenced by Deism were still in positions of power and influence during this time. Even well into the 19th century leaders such as John Tyler and Abraham Lincoln were influenced by Deism, primarily through Thomas Paine's **THE AGE OF REASON**. The most significant factor in the decline of Deism in America was the deaths of Elihu Palmer (1806) and Thomas Paine (1809); these preeminent advocates of Deism were not replaced by anyone as zealous as they had been. Another factor which contributed to the decline of Deism and the rise in Naturalism was the 1859 publication of Charles Darwin's **ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES**, which in the minds of many seemed to provide the necessary proof that God was no longer necessary to account for the origin and diversity of life on earth. Combined with the philosophical writings of David Hume, the "Father of Modern Skepticism," and especially the teachings of the German Atheist Friedrich Nietzsche, Naturalism was poised to take over as the dominant philosophy in intellectual and academic circles. Many Freethinkers in early America had been associated with Deism, but as a result of Darwin and the Naturalistic philosophers the Freethought movement would later become strongly associated with Atheism and Agnosticism.

Also, Deism in early America remained a worldview which did not organize into any significant groups, which might have helped Deism to continue flourishing. On the other hand, once Atheism began to flourish it formed into powerful groups such as the American Humanist Association (founded 1939) which has been a leading force in advocating Atheist beliefs and rights. Additionally, many theologians in the 19th century began equating Deism with Atheism, which not only discouraged Deistic thought but also further encouraged Atheism among those inclined toward religious and Biblical skepticism.

Deism never completely died out, however. The 2001 American Religious Identification Survey, which involved 50,000 participants, reported that the number of participants identifying themselves as Deists grew at the rate of 717 percent between 1990 and 2001. When generalized to the entire American population this makes Deism the fastest growing religious classification in America. Bob Johnson, who founded the World Union of Deists in 1993, has been a key leader in further reviving Deism today. Several Deist groups and websites have been formed in recent years, renewing interest in this once influential worldview.

It is popular for Christian apologists to counter the claims of the so-called "New Atheists" such as Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, and this is an important and worthwhile endeavor. However, no one currently seems interested in addressing the concerns of Deism, which is peculiar in light of the fact that Deists have a stronger case for their beliefs than Atheists do. By reading Deist literature, both past and present, I have been forced to search for answers to their claims, many of which are legitimate and need to be addressed. As a result, I have a greater appreciation for Deistic thought although I have not "crossed over" into the Deist camp. I do believe that Christians can learn from Deists, and Deism forces the followers of Christ to explore the issues brought forward by Deists. Like the Bereans (**ACTS 17:11**), all Christians need to examine the scriptures and study hard to "show themselves approved workmen of God" (**II TIMOTHY 2:15**) and resolve to find answers to the questions raised by the skeptics of our time (**I PETER 3:15**).

AMERICA: THE LAND OF THE FREE

The question on my mind is this: Was America intended to be a nation for Christ, or a nation for religious freedom? I believe that America was intended to be a nation for religious freedom, where all of its citizens are free to worship God as they see fit or even to not worship at all.⁵⁵ The fact that we have religious freedom in this country, as guaranteed through the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, is proof of this. If we were intended to be a Christian nation, then all other religions would have second-class status in this nation, and that is definitely not the case. In fact, I would say that Christianity is verbally attacked in the media as much or more than any other religion, something an official state religion is not prone to. Beyond the man-made legalities involved in religious freedom, I believe that God also grants us the freedom to worship as we choose, as guaranteed through Free Will. Jon Meacham sums up the importance of religious freedom in America:

The great good news about America – the American gospel, if you will – is that religion shapes the life of the nation without strangling it. Belief in God is central to the country’s experience, yet for the broad center, faith is a matter of choice, not coercion, and the legacy of the Founding is that the sensible center holds. It does so because the Founders believed themselves at work in the service of both God and man, not just one or the other.

-AMERICAN GOSPEL: GOD, THE FOUNDING FATHERS, AND THE MAKING OF A NATION by Jon Meacham (2006), p. 5.

Read the words of an agnostic who understands the concept of separation between church and state:

Our fathers founded the first secular government that was ever founded in this world. The first secular government; the first government that said every church has exactly the same rights and no more; every religion has the same rights, and no more. In other words, our fathers were the first men who had the sense, had the genius, to know that no church should be allowed to have a sword; that it should be allowed only to exert its moral influence.

-Robert Ingersoll (1833-1899), a Civil War colonel, an Illinois political leader and a Freethinker noted for his defense of agnosticism, quoted in 1876.

Deism, therefore, had every right to be a part of the religious landscape of this nation during its formative years, just as Deism still has every right to be one of the worldview choices today. The influence of Deism in this nation was not a bad thing – it forced our Founding Fathers to explore their faith more fully and to search for answers to the big questions of life, and caused them to experience the American right of diversity in religious belief. Deists and Christians, as well as Jews and all other religious adherents, were able to work together for the common good of the nation in our beginning, but we seem to have lost grasp of that ability. There is much work that needs to be done in this area of worldview respect, and it will require a deep reflection of our personal beliefs and the willingness to accept the religious rights of others without compromising our own beliefs. On a positive note, Christian Deist Robin James – the author of the webpage “American Values, Christian Deism” and one of the reviewers of the initial draft of this paper – demonstrated both friendliness and a willingness to respect my traditional Christian worldview while remaining true to his beliefs:

You have obviously spent a lot of time and effort researching and thinking about this topic and your paper is reasoned and well balanced. I hope it will bring some understanding to both Deists and traditional Christians. Most all of us seem to have the same goals and desires as to how we relate to others. It would be great if we would try to take the

message from the Bible that those people tried to leave us and not concern ourselves with the aspects that really don't matter. For example; does it really matter if God spent 7 days creating the world or 7 centuries?

On another note, one reason some of the Founding Fathers were supportive of their local churches may have been because of the community work they did. Most of our early schools, hospitals and charities were operated by churches.

-Email correspondence with Robin James, the author of the webpage "American Values, Christian Deism", on November 9, 2009.

Christian Deist John Lindell, the author of the webpage "Christian Deism and the Human Jesus", was also very kind in his comments regarding the initial draft of this paper and provided me with helpful suggestions. It was inspiring to see that these types of positive interactions can take place in this often divisive area of worldviews.

CONCLUSION

Let me summarize the five key points of this paper:

1. The majority of the 250 or so Founding Fathers were Christians. The majority of them were Protestant, but a significant Roman Catholic population also existed before and during American Independence. At this time in America, Unitarianism was substantially different from the Unitarian Universalism of today, and despite its liberal stance on many issues Unitarianism would technically be classified as Protestant during this time in American history.
2. Despite the Christian majority of the Founding Fathers, however, it is obvious that Deism had a very strong influence in America at this time, including several of the key leaders of the 18th and early 19th centuries. Some of these key leaders included the first five presidents and Benjamin Franklin, although they tended to be a blend of Deistic thought and Christian morality with a healthy amount of respect for the Judeo-Christian scriptures.
3. The anti-Christian Deists were very small in number. However, this small group includes two very recognizable names: Thomas Paine, most famous for his patriotic classic **COMMON SENSE**, and Revolutionary War hero Ethan Allen.
4. The wives and daughters of the Founding Fathers tended to hold orthodox Christian beliefs, including the wives and daughters of the first five presidents who were influenced by Deism.
5. America was not founded as a Christian nation, although most of the Founding Fathers and the general population as a whole were Christians. America was founded as a nation of freedom: political freedom, religious freedom and every other way in which freedom is exercised. Separation of church and state was established in part to ensure that the government could not establish a state religion, which would give a preferred status to one particular church denomination or religion and provide for the potential corruptness which accompanies state religions. The Founding Fathers generally detested the royal and ecclesiastical authorities of Europe – both of which often worked together – and sought to avoid those pitfalls in America. Although some have claimed that America later became a Christian nation, I disagree. America has always been a nation in which Christians are the majority, but we have always been first and foremost a nation in which everyone is allowed to exercise their freedom of religion. This even includes Satanic groups and hate groups who use religious beliefs to support their claims, as much as I hate to acknowledge that fact.

I fear that many Christians who read this paper will become upset over my conclusions. However, the faiths of the Founding Fathers of this nation were what they were; no matter how

disappointed anyone may be over the fact that Deism infiltrated and influenced early America, the fact remains that some of the founders – and some of the key founders, at that – were either Deists or Christian Deists. They had the right to believe in Deism: the legal right that our Founding Fathers promoted and the Divine right granted us through Free Will. Although most of the Founding Fathers as defined in this paper were orthodox Christians, others from non-Christian religions and beliefs were also represented. America is, after all, the “great melting pot” which includes religious beliefs.

NOTES

1. Some religions may actually fall under the classification of two worldviews, Hinduism being a prime example. Although Hinduism is primarily Pantheistic because the Hindu version of God (Brahma) is viewed as an impersonal force permeating the universe, the worldview of Polytheism is also foundational to Hinduism: The various gods and goddesses are viewed as being manifestations of the traits or characteristics of Brahma.

2. Not all scholars are in agreement concerning the categories of philosophical worldviews, but I have relied upon the categories put forth in **WORLDVIEWS COMPARISON** by Rose Publishing for this paper. Examples of other worldview categories may be found in **CLASH OF WORLDS** (1990) by David Burnett and **THE UNIVERSE NEXT DOOR (3RD edition)** (1997) by James Sire.

David Burnett categorizes as follows:

1. The secular worldview
2. The primal worldview
3. The Hindu worldview
4. The Chinese worldview
5. The Islamic worldview
6. The New Age worldview
7. The Neo-Pagan worldview
8. The Biblical worldview

James Sire categorizes as follows:

1. Christian Theism
2. Deism
3. Naturalism
4. Nihilism
5. Existentialism
6. Eastern Pantheistic Monism
7. The New Age
8. Postmodernism

3. **AMERICAN NONES: THE PROFILE OF THE NO RELIGION POPULATION. A Report Based on the American Religious Identification Survey 2008.** Found at www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org/reports/NONES_08.pdf

4. **LARGEST RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.** Found at www.adherents.com/rel_USA.html

5. The concept of God varies widely, of course. The Jew, Christian, Muslim, Deist, Pantheist, Panentheist and Finite Godist all believe in a Supreme Being, yet there are major differences in how each of them views God.

6. **DEISM: ALIVE AND WELL IN AMERICA** by Steven Waldman. September 23, 2009. Found at www.online.wsj.com/article/SB125365145301031757.htm#articleTabs%3Darticle

7. **BRITAIN'S HIDDEN RELIGION** by Sholto Byrnes. April 9, 2009. Found at www.newstatesman.com/religion/2009/04/god-flew-deism-world-atheist

8. For a refutation of this claim, please refer to **WHO DO YOU SAY I AM? ANSWERING CONTROVERSIAL CLAIMS ABOUT CHRIST** by Randy Hroziencik. December 2008 Examine the Evidence presentation at Bethel Baptist Church. Found at www.mybethel.com/images/falseclaims.pdf

9. As it was pre-programmed by God to do.

10. A wisdom teacher may be defined as a person who taught wisdom and proper moral conduct to the people of his time and location; usually wisdom teachers are associated with men from ancient times who founded a world religion. Examples of wisdom teachers other than Jesus would include Buddha (Buddhism), Mahavira (Jainism), Confucius (Confucianism), Lao Tzu (Taoism), Zoroaster (Zoroastrianism) and Muhammad (Islam). As a Christian I view Jesus in a much different light than these other examples, believing that Jesus was and is God incarnate.

11. I define creationism as the belief that a Supreme Being (God) has created the universe, earth and life in some manner. This may range from theistic evolutionism to young earth creationism. Obviously my definition of creationism is very broad and certainly not shared by many Christians who choose to more narrowly define the term. In American society today the term creationism often implies young earth creationism.

12. Freethought is the term used to describe the philosophical approach of those who reject abiding to the doctrines or beliefs of organized religions, traditions or any other dogma, instead preferring to form their own beliefs as based upon science, logic and reason. Freethinkers may subscribe to any worldview, but have typically been associated with Deism, especially in early America, and Atheism and Agnosticism which is more common today.

13. **RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.** Found at www.adherents.com/gov/Founding_Fathers_Religion.html#Declaration

14. **HISTORY OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA.** Found at www.oca.org/QA.asp?ID=39&SID=3

15. The traditional religions of Africa were likely part of the lives of the slaves living in America, although they would have been guarded in revealing their religious beliefs. The following quote demonstrates that the Africans knew of the Creator:

Prior to the arrival of Christianity, most African tribes were outwardly polytheistic. They focused on appeasing local deities thought to control the forces of nature. Behind this polytheism, though, was a widespread African belief in a supreme God – a High God superior to the local gods. This High God was the Creator, all-powerful, and morally pure. However, He was removed from humanity and inaccessible for most practical purposes.

-SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS by Britton Weimer and Paul Johnson (2003), pp. 12-13.

16. The Native Americans worshipped the Great Spirit, as well as the lesser spirits, in their traditional manner. The following quote demonstrates that the Native Americans also knew of the Creator:

Despite their distinct cultures, most Native Americans held certain religious beliefs in common. Most associated gods with the forces of nature, gods who must be appeased in crises such as drought and disease. Significantly, most also believed that there is a Great Spirit who is superior to the particular gods of nature.

-SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS by Britton Weimer and Paul Johnson (2003), p. 9.

Names for the Great Spirit include Wankan Tanka (Dakota), Gicelemu Kaong (Delaware), Taiowa (Hopi), Wakonda (Omaha) and Tirawa (Pawnee).

17. According to Bob Johnson, the Founder and Director of the World Union of Deists, one of the reasons Thomas Paine wrote **THE AGE OF REASON** was to stop the spread of Atheism in France. Therefore, **THE AGE OF REASON** served a dual purpose: One, to rebuke Christianity and the Bible and two, to stop the spread of Atheism in France. Based on an email correspondence with Bob Johnson on November 17, 2009.

18. **ORIGINAL INTENT** by David Barton (1996), pp. 31-33.

19. Some would argue that the elite among Freemasonry are alone privileged to the occult, esoteric knowledge that forms the upper layer of this secret society, but regardless of whether or not that is true it is safe to say that the vast majority of Freemasons are men of high moral character who would have no interest in exploring occult teachings.

20. The Founding Fathers were often true Renaissance men who were competent in many areas: Law, politics, architecture and the sciences, to name only a few. Benjamin Franklin was gifted not only as a diplomat, but also as a scientist, inventor, philosopher, author, printer-publisher and businessman. Thomas Jefferson was not only a reknown statesman, but many Americans today have forgotten that he was a gifted scientist who was known as the "Father of American Archaeology" for his development of stratification methodology, which is the foundation of modern archaeological techniques. Jefferson excelled in all areas of anthropology, including ethnology and comparative linguistics, as well as paleontology and even medicine. His **NOTES ON THE STATE OF VIRGINIA** was a great scientific work in his day, for which Jefferson was held in high regard by his peers as being a first-class scientist.

During this time in history – well before the 1859 publication of Charles Darwin's **ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES** – there was little separation of science and religion. In fact, theology was known as the "Queen of the Sciences" due to the widespread belief that God created a universe of fixed order which lent itself to scientific discovery. The Western scientists of the day tended to be men of strong Christian conviction. Thomas Jefferson's heroes were Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton and John Locke, all great scientists who acknowledged the Creator. Jefferson referred to them as the "trinity of great men" for their contributions to the advancement of science while remaining true to their belief in the Creator.

The sciences in early America were highly regarded by most people, especially the Founding Fathers. Although science in modern America is often viewed as being the enemy of God, our early leaders viewed science as being the only way apart from scripture to begin to understand the "mind of God."

21. **CHRISTIANITY AND THE CONSTITUTION: THE FAITH OF OUR FOUNDING FATHERS** by John Eidsmoe (1987), p. 40.

22. The following quote is from David Holmes:

Like Washington, Jefferson, and Madison, James Monroe was born and baptized in what Virginians of the time called *the Church, the Church of England, the Established Church, or the Church of Virginia*. The independence of the 13 colonies prompted the American members of the Church of England to rename their church and to discard the word "England." In its place, they adopted in the 1780s the term *Episcopal* (essentially meaning "we have bishops") and renamed their denomination *The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America*. The name traced back to the tumultuous Commonwealth period in English history, when clergy and laity who desired continued rule by bishops

used that term for themselves. In later centuries the term *Anglican* (from the Latin for "English") came into common use to describe churches in any country that held the faith and practice of the Church of England.

-THE RELIGION OF JAMES MONROE by David Holmes. Found at www.vqronline.org/articles/2003/autumn/holmes-religion-james-monroe/

23. Washington's diary entry for March 3, 1787 names Reverend Mr. Weems as a guest in his home.

24. William White commenting to Colonel Hugh Mercer, November 23, 1832; quoted in **GEORGE WASHINGTON AND RELIGION** by Paul Boller (1963), pp. 66-67.

25. Some accounts do establish that Washington did at times participate in Communion. See **CHRISTIANITY AND THE CONSTITUTION: THE FAITH OF OUR FOUNDING FATHERS** by John Eidsmoe (1987), pp. 133-135.

26. **THE U.S. FOUNDING FATHERS: THEIR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS** by Joseph Ellis. February 23, 2007. Found at www.britannica.com/blogs/2007/02/the-us-founding-fathers-their-religious-beliefs/

27. Nelly Custis was Martha Washington's granddaughter, and when Nelly's father died George and Martha Washington adopted her. Nelly lived in the Washington home for 20 years.

28. Quoted in **CHRISTIANITY AND THE CONSTITUTION: THE FAITH OF OUR FOUNDING FATHERS** by John Eidsmoe (1987), pp. 140-141.

29. **CHRISTIANITY AND THE CONSTITUTION: THE FAITH OF OUR FOUNDING FATHERS** by John Eidsmoe (1987), p. 257.

30. **CHRISTIANITY AND THE CONSTITUTION: THE FAITH OF OUR FOUNDING FATHERS** by John Eidsmoe (1987), pp. 283-284.

31. **TIMELINE OF JEFFERSON'S LIFE**. Found at www.monticello.org/jefferson/timeline.html

32. Unitarianism in Jefferson's day was significantly different from the Unitarian Universalism of today; see the section titled **UNITARIANISM AND DEISM**.

33. Newton, like many described in this paper, is not easy to label in terms of religious beliefs. Like the Deists of his day Newton leaned toward natural theology with his emphasis on discovering God through the study of nature, yet unlike the European Deists of his day Newton had great interest in the books of the Bible, particularly **REVELATION** and the study of end-times prophecies. Newton was also an alchemist who had studied occult beliefs extensively, although that does not make him an occultist in the modern sense of the word. 20th century economist John Maynard Keynes, who had read Newton's works, said that "Newton was not the first of the age of reason. He was the last of the magicians." It is probably accurate to say that Newton was both. Refer to **WHY YOU THINK THE WAY YOU DO** by Glenn Sunshine (2009), pp. 130-133.

34. John Milton was the 17th century poet most famous for the epic poem **PARADISE LOST**.

35. Reverend William Linn, a Dutch Reformed minister in New York City, was especially bold in calling into question Jefferson's religious beliefs during the 1800 presidential campaign, even referring – at least indirectly – to Jefferson as an infidel. His pamphlet, titled **SERIOUS CONSIDERATIONS ON THE ELECTION OF A PRESIDENT**, asked frontal assault questions such as "Does Jefferson ever go to church?", "How does he spend the Lord's day?" and "Is he

known to worship with any denomination of Christians?” That was likely the beginning of Jefferson’s habit of taking precaution against discussing his personal theology to anyone other than those he could trust to keep the matter confidential. That may also have been the beginning of his mistrust of (at least some) clergymen.

36. Madison’s father served as a church vestryman and a lay delegate to the Episcopal Convention of 1776. His mother was a pious communicant in the church. Refer to **CHRISTIANITY AND THE CONSTITUTION: THE FAITH OF OUR FOUNDING FATHERS** by John Eidsmoe (1987), p. 94.

37. **CHRISTIANITY AND THE CONSTITUTION: THE FAITH OF OUR FOUNDING FATHERS** by John Eidsmoe (1987), p. 111.

38. **THE AGE OF REASON** was partly written just prior to being imprisoned, partly written while staying in the home of the Monroes in France and partly written either just prior to leaving France or just after arriving back in America. It should be noted that accounts vary.

39. Found at www.earlyamericanhistory.net/founding_fathers.htm

40. I would define a church-going Deist as one who leans more heavily toward traditional Deism than does a Christian Deist. Jefferson may be labeled a church-going Deist because he was often antagonistic toward certain members of the clergy and made no room for the possibility of miracles. It is acceptable to simply refer to Jefferson as a Christian Deist, however – the terms church-going Deist and Christian Deist may be splitting hairs. Jefferson’s respect for Jesus as a great teacher of wisdom and morals was beyond question, and therefore he was a Christian in that very loose, humanistic sense of the word.

41. According to Bob Johnson, the Founder and Director of the World Union of Deists, the Founding Fathers must not have taken orthodox beliefs too seriously, for if they did they would have honored the Biblical prohibition against resisting government power (“the powers that be”) which is found in **ROMANS 13:1-7**.

42. **WHY YOU THINK THE WAY YOU DO** by Glenn Sunshine (2009), p. 152.

43. There has always been tension within Christianity regarding Freemasonry. Many Christians, especially Roman Catholics, some Lutheran synods and many of the evangelical churches, have been critical of Freemasonry, claiming that Masons are involved in secret occult rituals due to Freemasonry’s interest in the ancient mystery religions of Egypt, Greece, Rome, etc. Other Christians consider Freemasonry to be nothing more than a fraternal order concerned with charitable good works. I will not address this controversial issue in this paper.

44. **CHRISTIANITY AND THE CONSTITUTION: THE FAITH OF OUR FOUNDING FATHERS** by John Eidsmoe (1987), p. 46.

45. **ORIGINAL INTENT** by David Barton (1996), p. 380.

46. Religious pluralism is the belief that “all religions lead to God”. Pluralists believe that one religion is as valid and truthful as any other.

47. Great resources are **THE PASSION AND THE EMPTY TOMB** by John Ankerberg & John Weldon (2005), **THE SEARCH FOR MESSIAH** by Mark Eastman & Chuck Smith (1996), **THE JESUS INQUEST** by Charles Foster (2006), **JESUS: THE GREAT DEBATE** by Grant Jeffrey (1999), **C.S. LEWIS’S CASE FOR CHRIST** by Art Lindsley (2005), **EVIDENCE FOR JESUS** by Ralph Muncaster (2004), **THE CASE FOR CHRIST** by Lee Strobel (1998) and **THE CASE FOR THE REAL JESUS** by Lee Strobel (2007).

48. “Deists for Jesus” could acknowledge Jesus as a great moral teacher of the ancient world, and in that way would be “Deists for Jesus”, but that is worlds apart from the orthodox Christian claim that Jesus is God.

49. Artemis was known as the goddess Diana in the Greek culture.

50. Paganism in the ancient world was a Polytheistic and nature-based religion. Neo-Paganism is the modern day revival in the worship of nature and the gods and goddesses who are believed to be part of this world.

51. Not everyone agrees with this, of course. Many Christians do not, and certainly Deists do not as well. The following quote is from one who is skeptical of my reasoning:

You would think God, since Christians believe the Bible is the word of God, would make his word easy and simple to understand for all people. I think what you’re doing regarding women and Christianity is justifying a bad teaching. Paul was a Jew and the Torah teaches Jews to look down on women. Even the Jewish/Hebrew god of the Old Testament valued females about half of what he valued men. This mentality would be deeply ingrained in Paul/Saul if that is indeed who wrote it.

-Bob Johnson, Founder and Director of the World Union of Deists in an email correspondence dated November 17, 2009.

52. Not all scholars are in agreement on the specifics, of course. For instance, many believe that the Great Flood was nothing more than an especially bad flood involving the Tigris and Euphrates rivers whereas others may believe the flood legend was based on a real flood far greater than just extreme flooding of these Mesopotamian rivers – in other words a worldwide disaster. It should not be surprising that scholars are not in full agreement, as they rarely are over any matter.

53. Divine origin of the Bible is through the inspired writings of people, not directly through the physical handwriting of God. God inspired people to write of those things that are important to both God and people, using the unique styles and talents of the writers.

54. Excellent resources are **EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE** by Ralph Muncaster (2004), **SEARCHING FOR THE ORIGINAL BIBLE** by Randall Price (2007) and **THE BIBLE: A MESSAGE FROM GOD** by Lee Johnson. January 2008 Examine the Evidence presentation at Bethel Baptist Church. Found at www.mybethel.com/images/lee12208.pdf

55. The following quote highlights the fact that the term *religious freedom* did not mean the same thing to early Americans that it means to us today:

I think we need to keep in mind that the 13 colonies were not all founded for the same reasons, and terms like *religious freedom* did not mean the same thing in the 17th and 18th centuries that they do today. It seems fairly clear, for example, that Jamestown (Virginia) was founded as a commercial enterprise, and the Church of England was the established church as a matter of course. The Massachusetts Bay Colony was founded for a religious purpose but allowing freedom of religion as we understand that term today was not part of the plan. The Puritan Calvinists intended to set an example of how true Christians lived their lives. To make sure that example was clear, dissent was not tolerated, and I believe a few Quakers were even hung on Boston Common, and Roger Williams was shown the door for his strange ideas on separation of church and state, among other things.

-Fred Visel, Carl Sandburg College Professor of History and Geography, in an email correspondence dated November 6, 2009.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

The following resources were consulted in the preparation of this paper. Although I have no doubt that many other fine resources exist, the following books, videos and websites should be more than adequate to provide a well-rounded examination of this fascinating topic.

BOOKS

The following three books are neutral (neither pro-Christian nor pro-Deist) regarding the faiths of the Founding Fathers of this nation.

Holmes, David. **THE FAITHS OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS.** 2006.

This is an excellent introduction to the religious leanings of the Founding Fathers. The author, a professor of religious studies at the College of William and Mary, has done extensive research into this often-neglected topic, demonstrating through the writings of the Founding Fathers that Deism had deeply penetrated this nation during its formative years.

Mapp, Alf. **THE FAITHS OF OUR FATHERS: WHAT AMERICA'S FOUNDERS REALLY BELIEVED.** 2003.

The author, Eminent Scholar Emeritus at Old Dominion University, covers the religious beliefs of eleven of the key Founding Fathers of this nation – Deist, Christian, and even an interesting chapter on Polish Jew Haym Salomon. This is also an excellent introduction to this often-neglected topic.

Meacham, Jon. **AMERICAN GOSPEL.** 2006.

Meacham, the editor of *Newsweek*, covers the religious state of this nation from its beginning to the present, with the first two chapters being the most important to this study, although the third chapter covers the Civil War era and examines the influences of both Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin, who were born on the same day in history.

The following books on the topic of the faiths of the Founding Fathers are pro-Christian.

Barton, David. **CELEBRATE LIBERTY! FAMOUS PATRIOTIC SPEECHES & SERMONS.** 2003.

This is a compilation of famous speeches and sermons that helped to inspire the Founding Fathers. The book reveals the strong influence of the Bible on the Founding Fathers.

Barton, David. **ORIGINAL INTENT: THE COURTS, THE CONSTITUTION, & RELIGION.** 1996.

David Barton may very well be the most knowledgeable scholar in America on the topic of the faiths of the Founding Fathers and the role that religion plays in our government. The book covers a wide range of topics and is very well researched.

Eidsmoe, John. **CHRISTIANITY AND THE CONSTITUTION: THE FAITH OF OUR FOUNDING FATHERS.** 1987.

Eidsmoe begins by looking at the major influences that affected the Founding Fathers, namely Calvinism, Puritanism, Deism and Freemasonry, and then looks at several of the key Founding Fathers. This is a very well written look at the faiths of the Founding Fathers.

Gibbs, David with Jerry Newcombe. **ONE NATION UNDER GOD: TEN THINGS EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE FOUNDING OF AMERICA.** 2003.

The book is best described on the back cover: "Here are ten incontrovertible, heavily documented, and politically incorrect historical facts that prove that Christianity played a pivotal role in uniquely shaping the most free, prosperous, and powerful nation in history."

Morris, Benjamin. **THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND CHARACTER OF THE CIVIL INSTITUTIONS**

OF THE UNITED STATES. 2007.

This is an extensive look at the title of the book, examining what the Founding Fathers themselves had to say on the topic of faith and its relationship to the founding of America.

The following two books are by Christian authors and detail the history and beliefs of Deism.

Sire, James. **THE UNIVERSE NEXT DOOR (3rd edition).** 1997.

This classic work by James Sire covers the different worldview philosophies from a Christian perspective, highlighting how Deism compares and contrasts to Atheism, Pantheism and the Biblical worldview among others.

Sunshine, Glenn. **WHY YOU THINK THE WAY YOU DO.** 2009.

This recent book is the best resource I have found covering the history of Western worldviews, and details why Deism became popular during the Enlightenment period and why it eventually was eclipsed by Naturalism.

The following two books are pro-Deist and offer Christians a look at Deism from the viewpoint of those who hold to this worldview.

Fontaine, Raymond. **MY LIFE WITH GOD IN AND OUT OF THE CHURCH.** 2000.

Written by a former Roman Catholic priest, this autobiography chronicles the author's journey from a deep faith in Roman Catholicism to Deism. This book not only contains important information regarding the general tenants of Deism, but also offers insight into the emotional aspects involved in a conversion to Deism.

Johnson, Bob. **DEISM: A REVOLUTION IN RELIGION, A REVOLUTION IN YOU.** 2009.

Written by the Founder and Director of the World Union of Deists, this is the best modern introduction to Deism that I am aware of. Although difficult for the devout Christian to read due to its direct frontal assault on Christianity, this book is useful for the Christian who truly wants to understand what Deism is really about and why some Deists are harsh towards the religions of the world which claim to have the revealed words of God.

EBOOK

The following ebook is from a pro-Christian viewpoint.

Demar, Gary. **THE CASE FOR AMERICA'S CHRISTIAN HERITAGE.** 2009.

Gary Demar is the president of American Vision, and a prolific writer in the area of Christian apologetics and culture with expertise in the area of Christianity and politics. This ebook may be requested without a fee from www.americanvision.org

VIDEOS

The following DVD's are from a Christian viewpoint.

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS. Bridgestone Multimedia Group. 2009.

This video takes a look at how our understanding of church and state relations has changed over time due to Supreme Court decisions and cultural pressures, in light of the original intentions of the Founding Fathers.

THE SPIRIT OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION. Vision Video. 2007.

This video features David Barton of Wallbuilders, the "organization dedicated to the restoration and rebuilding of the values on which America was built and which, in recent years, have been seriously undermined." This video explores the strength of Christian character exhibited by the

Founding Fathers.

WEBSITES

The following websites concern the debate over the faiths of the Founding Fathers.

DEISM AND AMERICAS FOUNDERS

www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4783149/k.778D/Deism_and_Americas_Founders.htm

This is a very conservative Christian website which offers a very balanced view of the faiths of the Founding Fathers. The influence of Deism is not denied, but rather put in its proper perspective.

EVIDENCE OF THE DEISM OF THE US FOUNDERS

www.bobkwebsite.com/evdnceofdeismofusfndrs.html

This is an interesting article which affirms the fact that Deism was a very influential worldview in early America.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS OF UNITED STATES PRESIDENTS

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidents_of_the_United_States_by_religion

Wikipedia has been accused by some of being a poor resource for research papers, yet this article is very informative and checks out well with other resources that I have reviewed.

THE REVOLUTION OF BELIEF: FOUNDING FATHERS, DEISTS, ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS, AND THE SPIRITUAL CONTEXT OF 18TH CENTURY AMERICA

www.earlyamericanhistory.net/founding_fathers.htm

This is a very well-balanced article concerning the “spiritual pulse” of early America.

The following websites speculate about the religious views of Abraham Lincoln.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE DOCTRINE OF NECESSITY

www.historycooperative.org/journals/jala/18.1/guelzo.html

This article is lengthy and more indepth compared to the other article concerning the religious views of Abraham Lincoln.

THE AMBIGUOUS RELIGION OF PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN

www.adherents.com/people/pl/Abraham_Lincoln.html

This is a brief, reader-friendly article speculating about Lincoln's worldview.

The following websites are pro-Deist. They offer a view of Deism from those who hold strongly to this worldview, and contain numerous articles on Deism.

THE WORLD UNION OF DEISTS

www.deism.com

This website is, in my opinion, the best online resource for exploring Deism.

CHRISTIAN DEIST

www.christiandeist.com

This website is devoted to the melding of Christian morality with traditional Deist beliefs.

DEIST INFORMATION

www.deist.info

This website is a basic introduction to Deism.

GOD'S ONLINE HOME

www.godonlinehome.com

This website contains numerous views on God – Deism being only one of them. The article

DEISM AND USA FOUNDING FATHERS is a quick introduction to this topic from a Deist viewpoint.

THE HUMAN JESUS AND CHRISTIAN DEISM

www.christiandeistfellowship.com

This is the oldest Christian Deist website on the internet. The author, who reviewed the initial draft of this paper and offered several helpful suggestions, has many excellent articles available.

MODERN DEISM

www.moderndeism.com

This website is a basic introduction to Deism.

PANENDEISM.org

www.panendeism.org

This website is devoted to the melding of Deist and Panentheist philosophies.

POSITIVE DEISM

www.positivedeism.com

This website is a basic introduction to Deism.

SULLIVAN COUNTY – WELCOME TO DEISM AND REASON

www.sullivan-county.com/deism.htm

Sullivan County is a very extensive website on Deism with many diverse articles.

The following early American classics, online in their entirety, offer a point-counterpoint view on the Christian-Deist debate.

Thomas Paine. **THE AGE OF REASON.** 1794.

Thomas Paine's classic treatise on philosophy and religion is the gold standard by which almost all American Deists base their beliefs. This is a very difficult read for the devout Christian, but well worth the effort as the insight gained is tremendous. If you want to understand why Bible skeptics believe as they do, this book is a sure way to find out. The Christian apologist who desires to "always be ready with an answer" (**I PETER 3:15**) must first be ready to answer the challenges in this book. The book can be read online at

www.deism.com/images/theageofreason1794.pdf

Elias Boudinot. **THE AGE OF REVELATION.** 1801.

This book was written as a Christian response to Thomas Paine's **THE AGE OF REASON.** Boudinot was a delegate to the Continental Congress and a U.S. Congressman for New Jersey, as well as the president of the Continental Congress from 1782-1783, the director of the United States Mint from 1795-1805, and one of the founders and an early president of the American Bible Society. The book can be read online at

www.olivercowdery.com/texts/boud1790.htm

The Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution may be viewed online.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/index.htm

US CONSTITUTION

www.constitution.org/constit_.htm

ENCOURAGEMENT TO EXPLORE BOTH SIDES OF THE ISSUE

I have always held the belief that when one wants to explore a controversial issue it is important

to examine resources which are diverse in their viewpoint. In order to really “get a feel” for Deism and how some of the Founding Fathers may have thought about religion and spirituality, I had to immerse myself in Deist literature. As a result, I have come to understand what makes Deists “tick” – awe and respect for the Creator and a disdain for the evil deeds that “organized religions” have sometimes wrought throughout history, such as the Inquisition and radical Islamic terrorism. Although it may have been tempting to only read Christian literature on this subject, I knew that doing so would fail to render a well-rounded view on this controversial topic. Socrates is known for the motto “The unexamined life is not worth living.” I say that the unexamined faith is not worth having, and that is why I have not shied away from controversial topics such as this one. Deism has given me cause to study the scriptures in an attempt to answer Deist accusations, and that is a good thing. Deists, as well as Atheists or anyone who is skeptical of the Bible, force Christians to do their homework and become like the Bereans, who were not afraid to study hard and search for answers to the important questions of life.