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**Does the Constitution assume Christianity?**

In America's public schools, *the war for yesterday* (that is, how the story of yesterday is to be told) is being fought for the conquest of today and tomorrow (that is, how life is to be understood and lived). Let's call the opposing armies the Uniculturalists (with a melting pot on its banner) and the Multiculturalists (with a box of marbles on its banner). The first say, "America must recover its unity." And the second, "America's unity must be in the celebration of its diversity."

Currently, that war's most noisy battlefield is the Texas Board of Education. And the most prominent war reporter is Russell Shorto, whose "How Christian Were the Founders?" appeared in the 11 Feb 10 NYTimes Magazine. Both armies (or parties) worry him: the "Christian nation" uniculturals may succeed in getting into America's public-school textbooks an overemphasis on Christianity in America's origin-story; and the multiculturals - in the chaotic curricula of our public schools - now endanger our children's sense that America is one nation rather than many.

Underneath and within this culture war is a war of *two religions*. Fairly, Shorto states our origin-situation: "The founders were rooted in Christianity...and...steeped in an Enlightenment rationalism..." Though the rationalism was nowhere near as weighty a factor, by 1933 (a Humanist Manifesto) it had settled into an anti-God philosophy which implicitly aimed to eliminate God from our public schools. John Dewey, a signer, was explicit about that aim.

The weight of the issue itself? A Texas School Board member is quoted both by Shorto and in a Scripps Howard parallel article ("Founders, faith, nation") for the truism that "the philosophy of the classroom in one generation will be the philosophy of the government in the next."

The reason for speaking of war rather than philosophy is that the cultural confrontation in America today between a godly and a godless view of America's origin is not merely philosophical. Widely at work in our society is an *aggressive atheistic secularism*, aiming not only to rip God out of the story of America's founding but even to rip the crosses out of Arlington Cemetery. The ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) is only the most prominent organization within this movement, which over-reads the First Amendment (the separation of political and religious organizations from each other) to mean the separation of religion from public life. Shorto's narrative fairly presents the "Founding" war's opposing sides - for short, the God side and the anti-God side.

The heart of the anti-God side is that in not mentioning God, the U.S. Constitution proves that the Framers were essentially secular, wanting no influence of religion on government. In literary criticism, that "proof" is called the "argument from silence" *fallacy*, the il-logic that anything unmentioned in a document must have been unimportant to its author(s). It is true that the Constitution doesn't mention religion, but it's not true (as Mathis claims on his side of the[**Scripps Howard article**](http://scrippsnews.com/content/redblue-america-how-christian-were-founders-does-it-matter)) that "religion makes no appearance until the First Amendment, added four years after. For the Founders, religion was a legal afterthought." The truth is, religion was a seven-year forethought, in the Constitution's predecessor, the Articles of Confederation. Indeed, also in the Declaration of Independence, a five-year forethought to the Articles of Confederation.

1776 (adoption), the Declaration of Independence mentions God three times: "created equal,...endowed by their Creator...Nature's God....a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence [at the time, a common name for God]."

1781 (ratification), the Articles of Confederation call God "the Great Governor of the World," who "incline[d] the hearts of the [state] legislatures to approve of, and to authorize us to ratify the said Articles of Confederation and perpetual Union." According to the earlier form of our constitution, the American government is *founded on the authority of God*. (The same year, in his Notes on Virginia, Jefferson affirmed that our "liberties are the gift of God," whose "wrath" threatens our violation of them.)

1788 (ratification), the Constitution repeats the specifically Christian ending of the Articles of Confederation: "In the year of our Lord,...." (the English translation of the Latin "Anno Domini [A.D.]," the "our" being added and the "Dominus" being Jesus). Yes, a conventional expression. But *the Constitution assumes Christianity* - in various forms, the religion of Euro-America.

1791 (ratification), the Bill of Rlghts, whose First Amendment frees political and religious institutions from one another, and proscribes the federal government from "prohibiting the free exercise " of religion. Cultural historians agree that this is *America's unique contribution*to the history of government.

The Texas textbook struggle is, currently, the most public skirmish in America's Second Civil War, a war not of muscle but of mind. Again we have *two Americas*, each with its own narrative and hope. And each America is preparing its children to battle the other America's children. But the First Amendment was a new creation, and we can pray for and work toward the emergence of an American mind that will do violence to neither American history nor the American hope.

**BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT  |  FEBRUARY 22, 2010; 3:51 PM ETSAVE & SHARE:                       
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