

Is America a Christian Nation?

David Barton

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by David Barton



Modern claims that America is not a Christian nation are rarely noticed or refuted today because of the nation's widespread lack of knowledge about America's history and foundation. To help provide the missing historical knowledge necessary to combat today's post-modern revisionism, presented below will be some statements by previous presidents, legislatures, and courts (as well as by current national Jewish spokesmen) about America being a Christian nation. These declarations from all three branches of government are representative of scores of others and therefore comprise only the proverbial "tip of the iceberg."

Defining a Christian Nation

Contemporary critics who assert that America is not a Christian nation always refrain from offering any definition of what the term "Christian nation" means. So what is an accurate definition of that term as demonstrated by the American experience?

Contrary to what critics imply, a Christian nation is not one in which all citizens are Christians, or the laws require everyone to adhere to Christian theology, or all leaders are Christians, or any other such superficial measurement. As Supreme Court Justice David Brewer (1837-1910) explained:



[I]n what sense can [America] be called a Christian nation? Not in the sense that Christianity is the established religion or that the people are in any manner compelled to support it. On the contrary, the Constitution specifically provides that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Neither is it Christian in the sense that all its citizens are either in fact or name Christians. On the contrary, all religions have free scope within our borders. Numbers of our people profess other religions, and many reject all. Nor is it Christian in the sense that a profession of Christianity is a condition of holding office or otherwise engaging in public service, or essential to recognition either politically or socially. In fact, the government as a legal organization is independent of all religions. Nevertheless, we constantly speak of this republic as a Christian nation – in fact, as the leading Christian nation of the world. ¹

So, if being a Christian nation is not based on any of the above criterion, then what makes America a Christian nation? According to Justice Brewer, America was "of all the nations in the world . . . most justly called a Christian nation" because Christianity "has so largely shaped and molded it." ²

Constitutional law professor Edward Mansfield (1801-1880) similarly acknowledged:

In every country, the morals of a people – whatever they may be – take their form and spirit from their religion. For example, the marriage of brothers and sisters was permitted among the Egyptians because such had been the precedent set by their gods, Isis and Osiris. So, too, the classic nations celebrated the drunken rites of Bacchus. Thus, too, the Turk has become lazy and inert because dependent upon Fate, as taught by the Koran. And when in recent times there arose a nation [i.e., France] whose philosophers [e.g. Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Helvetius, etc.] discovered there was no God and no religion, the nation was thrown into that dismal case in which there was no law and no morals. . . . In the United States, Christianity is the original, spontaneous, and national religion. ³

Founding Father and U. S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall agreed:

[W]ith us, Christianity and religion are identified. It would be strange, indeed, if with such a people our institutions did not presuppose Christianity and did not often refer to it and exhibit relations with it. ⁴



Christianity is the religion that shaped America and made her what she is today. In fact, historically speaking, it can be irrefutably demonstrated that Biblical Christianity in America produced many of the cherished traditions still enjoyed today, including:

- A republican rather than a theocratic form of government;
- The institutional separation of church and state (as opposed to today's enforced institutional *secularization* of church and state);
- Protection for religious toleration and the rights of conscience;
- A distinction between theology and behavior, thus allowing the incorporation into public policy of religious principles that promote good behavior but which do not enforce theological tenets (examples of this would include religious teachings such as the Good Samaritan, The Golden Rule, the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, etc., all of which promote positive civil behavior but do not impose ecclesiastical rites); and
- A free-market approach to religion, thus ensuring religious diversity and security for the rights of religious conscience.

Consequently, a Christian nation as demonstrated by the American experience is a nation founded upon Christian and Biblical principles, whose values, society, and institutions have largely been shaped by those principles. This definition was reaffirmed by American legal scholars and historians for generations ⁵ but is widely ignored by today's revisionists.

American Presidents Affirm that America is a Christian Nation

President Barack Obama is the first American president to deny that America is a Christian nation. ⁶ Notice a few representative statements on this subject by some of the forty-three previous presidents:

The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence were. . .
. the general principles of Christianity. ² **JOHN ADAMS**

[T]he teachings of the Bible are so interwoven and entwined with our whole civic and social life that it would be literally....impossible for us to figure to ourselves what that life would be if these teaching were removed. ⁸ **TEDDY ROOSEVELT**

America was born a Christian nation – America was born to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of Holy Scripture. ⁹ **WOODROW WILSON**

American life is builded, and can alone survive, upon . . . [the] fundamental philosophy announced by the Savior nineteen centuries ago. ¹⁰ **HERBERT HOOVER**

This is a Christian Nation. ¹¹ **HARRY TRUMAN**

Let us remember that as a Christian nation . . . we have a charge and a destiny. ¹² **RICHARD NIXON**

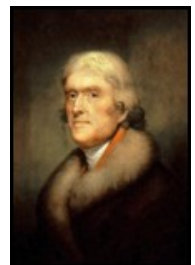
There are many additional examples, including even that of Thomas Jefferson. ¹³

Significantly, Jefferson was instrumental in establishing weekly Sunday worship services at the U. S. Capitol (a practice that continued through the 19th century) and was himself a regular and faithful attendant at those church services, ¹⁴ not even allowing inclement weather to dissuade his weekly horseback travel to the Capitol church. ¹⁵

(The fact that the U. S. Capitol building was available for church on Sundays was due to the Art. I, Sec. 7 constitutional requirement that forbade federal lawmaking on Sundays; and this recognition of a Christian Sabbath in the U. S. Constitution was cited by federal courts as proof of the Christian nature of America. ¹⁶ While not every Christian observes a Sunday Sabbath, no other religion in the world honors Sunday except Christianity. As one court noted, the various Sabbaths were “the Friday of the Mohammedan, the Saturday of the Israelite, or the Sunday of the Christian.” ¹⁷)

Why was Jefferson a faithful attendant at the Sunday church at the Capitol? He once explained to a friend while they were walking to church together:

No nation has ever existed or been governed without religion. Nor can be. The Christian religion is the best religion that has been given to man and I, as Chief Magistrate of this nation, am bound to give it the sanction of my example. ¹⁸



The U. S. Congress Affirms that America is a Christian Nation

Declarations from the Legislative Branch affirming America as a Christian nation are abundant. For example, in 1852-1853 when some citizens sought a complete secularization of the public square and a cessation of all religious activities by the

government, Congress responded with unambiguous declarations about America as a Christian nation:



HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE: Had the people, during the Revolution, had a suspicion of any attempt to war against Christianity, that Revolution would have been strangled in its cradle. At the time of the adoption of the Constitution and the amendments, the universal sentiment was that Christianity should be encouraged, not any one sect [denomination]. Any attempt to level and discard all religion would have been viewed with universal indignation. . . . In this age there can be no substitute for Christianity; that, in its general principles, is the great conservative element on which we must rely for the purity and permanence of free institutions. [19](#)

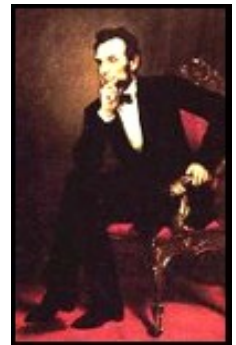
SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE: We are Christians, not because the law demands it, not to gain exclusive benefits or to avoid legal disabilities, but from choice and education; and in a land thus universally Christian, what is to be expected, what desired, but that we shall pay a due regard to Christianity? [20](#)

In 1856, the House of Representatives also declared:

[T]he great vital and conservative element in our system is the belief of our people in the pure doctrines and divine truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. [21](#)

On March 3, 1863 while in the midst of the Civil War, the U. S. Senate requested President Abraham Lincoln to “designate and set apart a day for national prayer and humiliation” [22](#) because:

[S]incerely believing that no people, however great in numbers and resources or however strong in the justice of their cause, can prosper without His favor; and at the same time deploring the national offences which have provoked His righteous judgment, yet encouraged in this day of trouble by the assurances of His word to seek Him for succor according to *His appointed way through Jesus Christ*, the Senate of the United States do hereby request the President of the United States, by his proclamation, to designate and set apart a day for national prayer and humiliation. [23](#) (emphasis added)



President Lincoln quickly complied with that request, [24](#) and [issued](#) what today has become one of the most famous and quoted proclamations in America’s history. [25](#)

Across the generations, our national reliance on God, the Bible, and Christianity has been repeatedly reaffirmed. In fact, consider five representative images produced by the U. S. Government. The first three are from World War II: one shows the Nazis as the enemy because they want to attack the Bible, and the other two encourage Americans to buy War Bonds by pointing to Christian images. The fourth and fifth images are from the Department of Agriculture in the 1960s, using the Bible and even

Smokey Bear in prayer as symbols to encourage Americans to be conscious of fire safety and to help preserve and conserve nature.

There are

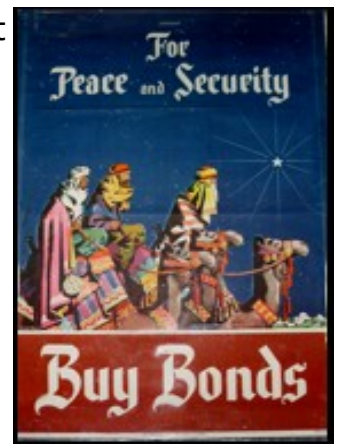


scores of other official actions by the U. S. Congress over the past two centuries affirming that America is a Christian nation.

The Judicial Branch Affirms that America is a Christian Nation

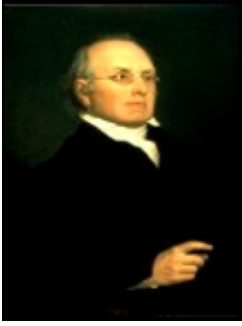
From the Judicial Branch, consider first some declarations of prominent U. S. Supreme Court Justices regarding America as a Christian nation.

Justice Joseph Story (1779-1845) was appointed to the Court by President James Madison. Story is considered the founder of Harvard Law School and authored the three-volume classic *Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States* (1833). In his 34 years on the Court, Story authored opinions in 286 cases, of which 269 were reported as the majority opinion or the opinion of the Court ²⁶ and his many contributions to American law have caused him to be called a "Father of American Jurisprudence." Justice Story openly declared:



One of the beautiful boasts of our municipal jurisprudence is that Christianity is a part of the Common Law. . . . There never has been a period in which the Common Law did not recognize Christianity as lying at its foundations. . . . I verily believe Christianity necessary to the support of civil society. ²⁷

His conclusion about America and Christianity was straightforward:



In [our] republic, there would seem to be a peculiar propriety in viewing the Christian religion as the great basis on which it must rest for its support and permanence. [28](#)

Justice John McLean (1785-1861) was appointed to the Court by President Andrew Jackson. McLean served in the U. S. Congress, as a judge on the Ohio Supreme Court, and then held cabinet positions under two U. S. Presidents. His view on the importance of Christianity to American government and its institutions was unambiguous:

For many years, my hope for the perpetuity of our institutions has rested upon Bible morality and the general dissemination of Christian principles. This is an element which did not exist in the ancient republics. It is a basis on which free governments may be maintained through all time. . . . Free government is not a self-moving machine. . . . Our mission of freedom is not carried out by brute force, by canon law, or any other law except the moral law and those Christian principles which are found in the Scriptures. [29](#)



Already mentioned at the beginning was Justice David Brewer (1837-1910), appointed to the Court by President Benjamin Harrison. Brewer held several judgeships in Kansas and served on a federal circuit court before his appointment to the Supreme Court. In addition to his already noted statements, Justice Brewer also declared:

We constantly speak of this republic as a Christian nation – in fact, as the leading Christian nation of the world. [30](#)

Brewer then chronicled the types of descriptions applied to nations:



We classify nations in various ways: as, for instance, by their form of government. One is a kingdom, another an empire, and still another a republic. Also by race. Great Britain is an Anglo-Saxon nation, France a Gallio, Germany a Teutonic, Russia a Slav. And still again by religion. One is a Mohammedan nation, others are heathen, and still others are Christian nations. This republic is classified among the Christian nations of the world. It was so formally declared by the Supreme Court of the United States. In the case of Holy Trinity Church vs. United States, 143 U.S. 471, that Court, after mentioning various circumstances, added, "these and many other matters which might be noticed, add a volume of unofficial declarations to the mass of organic utterances that this is a Christian nation." [31](#)

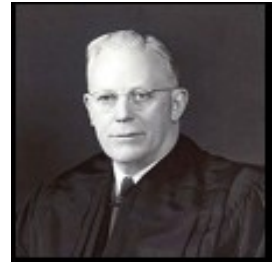
Brewer did not believe that calling America a Christian nation was a hollow appellation; in fact, he penned an entire book setting forth the evidence that America was a Christian nation. [32](#) He concluded:

[I] have said enough to show that Christianity came to this country with the first colonists; has been powerfully identified with its rapid development,

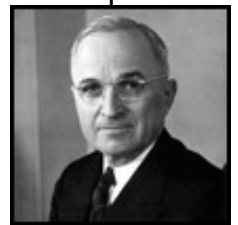
colonial and national, and today exists as a mighty factor in the life of the republic. This is a Christian nation. . . . [T]he calling of this republic a Christian nation is not a mere pretence, but a recognition of an historical, legal, and social truth. [33](#)

Justice Earl Warren (1891-1974) agreed with his predecessors. Before being appointed as Chief Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Warren had been the Attorney General of California. Warren declared:

I believe the entire Bill of Rights came into being because of the knowledge our forefathers had of the Bible and their belief in it: freedom of belief, of expression, of assembly, of petition, the dignity of the individual, the sanctity of the home, equal justice under law, and the reservation of powers to the people. . . . I like to believe we are living today in the spirit of the Christian religion. I like also to believe that as long as we do so, no great harm can come to our country. [34](#)



There are many similar declarations by other Supreme Court Justices, but in addition to the declarations of individual judges, the federal courts have repeatedly affirmed America to be a Christian nation – including the U. S. Supreme Court, which declared that America was “a Christian country,” [35](#) filled with “Christian people,” [36](#) and was indeed “a Christian nation.” [37](#) Dozens of other courts past and present have repeated these pronouncements [38](#) but so, too, have American Presidents – as in 1947 when President Harry Truman quoted the Supreme Court, declaring:



This is a Christian Nation. More than a half century ago that declaration was written into the decrees of the highest court in this land [in an 1892 decision]. [39](#)

American Jewish Leaders Agree with History

Jewish leaders, although firmly committed to their own faith, understand that by defending Christianity they are defending what has provided them their own religious liberty in America. For example, Jeff Jacoby, a Jewish columnist at the *Boston Globe* explains:



This is a Christian country – it was founded by Christians and built on broad Christian principles. Threatening? Far from it. It is in precisely this Christian country that Jews have known the most peaceful, prosperous, and successful existence in their long history. [40](#)

Aaron Zelman (a Jewish author and head of a civil rights organization) similarly declares:



[C]hristian America is the best home our people have found in 2,000 years. . . . [T]his remains the most tolerant, prosperous, and safest home we could be blessed with. [41](#)

Dennis Prager, a Jewish national columnist and popular talkshow host, warns:

If America abandons its Judeo-Christian values basis and the central role of the Jewish and Christian Bibles (its Founders' guiding text), we are all in big trouble, including, most especially, America's non-Christians. Just ask the Jews of secular Europe. [42](#)

Prager further explained:



I believe that it is good that America is a Christian nation. . . . I have had the privilege of speaking in nearly every Jewish community in America over the last 30 years, and I have frequently argued in favor of this view. Recently, I spoke to the Jewish community of a small North Carolina city. When some in the audience mentioned their fear of rising religiosity among Christians, I asked these audience-members if they loved living in their city. All of them said they did. Is it a coincidence, I then asked, that the city you so love (for its wonderful people, its safety for your children, its fine schools, and its values that enable you to raise your children with confidence) is a highly Christian city? Too many Americans do not appreciate the connection between American greatness and American Christianity. [43](#)

Don Feder, a Jewish columnist and long time writer for the *Boston Herald*, similarly acknowledges:

Clearly this nation was established by Christians. . . . As a Jew, I'm entirely comfortable with the concept of the Christian America. [44](#) The choice isn't Christian America or nothing, but Christian America or a neo-pagan, hedonistic, rights-without-responsibilities, anti-family, culture-of-death America. As an American Jew. . . . [I] feel very much at home here. [45](#)



In fact, Feder calls on Jews to defend the truth that America is a Christian Nation:

Jews – as Jews – must oppose revisionist efforts to deny our nation's Christian heritage, must stand against the drive to decouple our laws from Judeo-Christian ethics, and must counter attacks on public expressions of the religion of most Americans – Christianity. Jews are safer in a Christian America than in a secular America. [46](#)

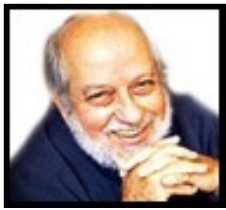
Michael Medved, a Jewish national talkshow host and columnist, agrees that America is indeed a Christian nation:

The framers may not have mentioned Christianity in the Constitution but they clearly intended that charter of liberty to govern a society of fervent faith, freely encouraged by government for the benefit of all. Their noble and unprecedented experiment never involved a religion-free or faithless state but did indeed presuppose America's unequivocal identity as a Christian nation. [47](#)



Burt Prelutsky, a Jewish columnist for the *Los Angeles Times* (and a freelance writer for the *New York Times*, *Washington Times*, *Sports Illustrated*, and other national

publications) and a patriotic Jewish American, gladly embraces America as a Christian nation and even resents the secularist post-modern attack on national Christian celebrations such as Christmas:



I never thought I'd live to see the day that Christmas would become a dirty word. . . .How is it, one well might ask, that in a Christian nation this is happening? And in case you find that designation objectionable, would you deny that India is a Hindu country, that Turkey is Muslim, that Poland is Catholic? That doesn't mean those nations are theocracies.

But when the overwhelming majority of a country's population is of one religion, and most Americans happen to be one sort of Christian or another, only a darn fool would deny the obvious. . . . This is a Christian nation, my friends. And all of us are fortunate it is one, and that so many millions of Americans have seen fit to live up to the highest precepts of their religion. It should never be forgotten that, in the main, it was Christian soldiers who fought and died to defeat Nazi Germany and who liberated the concentration camps. Speaking as a member of a minority group – and one of the smaller ones at that – I say it behooves those of us who don't accept Jesus Christ as our savior to show some gratitude to those who do, and to start respecting the values and traditions of the overwhelming majority of our fellow citizens, just as we keep insisting that they respect ours. Merry Christmas, my friends. [48](#)



Orthodox Rabbi Daniel Lapin of the Jewish Policy Center unequivocally declares

[I] understand that I live . . . in a Christian nation, albeit one where I can follow my faith as long as it doesn't conflict with the nation's principles. The same option is open to all Americans and will be available only as long as this nation's Christian roots are acknowledged and honored. [49](#)



In fact, with foreboding he warns:

Without a vibrant and vital Christianity, America is doomed, and without America, the west is doomed. Which is why I, an Orthodox Jewish rabbi, devoted to Jewish survival, the Torah, and Israel am so terrified of American Christianity caving in. [50](#) God help Jews if America ever becomes a post-Christian society! Just think of Europe! [51](#)

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There is much additional evidence, and it unequivocally demonstrates that any claim that America was not a Christian nation is an unabashed attempt at historical revisionism. Of such efforts, former Chief Justice William Rehnquist wisely observed, "no amount of repetition of historical errors . . . can make the errors true." [52](#)

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Endnotes

1. David J. Brewer, [*The United States: A Christian Nation*](#) (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1905), p. 12. [\(Return\)](#)
2. David J. Brewer, [*The United States: A Christian Nation*](#) (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1905), p. 57. [\(Return\)](#)
3. Edward Mansfield, [*American Education, Its Principle and Elements*](#) (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1851), p. 43. [\(Return\)](#)
4. John Marshall, *The Papers of John Marshall*, Charles Hobson, editor (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), Vol. XII, p. 278, to Rev. Jasper Adams, May 9, 1833. [\(Return\)](#)
5. Stephen Cowell, [*The Position of Christianity in the United States in its Relations with our Political Institutions*](#) (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1854), pp. 11-12, Joseph Story, [*A Familiar Exposition of the Constitution of the United States*](#) (Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon, and Webb, 1840), p. 260, §442. [\(Return\)](#)
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11. Harry S. Truman, "[Exchange of Messages With Pope Pius XII](#)," *American Presidency Project*, August 28, 1947.[\(Return\)](#)
12. Richard Nixon, "[Remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast](#)," *American Presidency Project*, February 1st, 1972.[\(Return\)](#)
13. Thomas Jefferson, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Barbara Oberg, editor (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), Vol. 30, p. 545, to Gouverneur Morris

on November 1, 1801. ([Return](#))

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15. William Parker Cutler and Julia Perkins Cutler, [Life, Journal, and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler](#) (Cincinnati: Colin Robert Clarke & Co., 1888), Vol. II, p. 119, in a letter to Dr. Joseph Torrey on January 3, 1803; see also his entry of December 26, 1802 (Vol. II, [p. 114](#)). ([Return](#))

16. See, for example, *Church of the Holy Trinity v. U. S.*, 143 U.S. 457, 465, 470-471 (1892); *City Council of Charleston v. S.A. Benjamin*, 2 Strob. 508, 518-520 (S.C. 1846); *State v. Ambs*, 20 Mo. 214, 1854 WL 4543 (Mo. 1854); *Neal v. Crew*, 12 Ga. 93, 1852 WL 1390 (1852); *Doremus v. Bd. of Educ.*, 71 A.2d 732, 7 N.J. Super. 442 (1950); *State v. Chicago, B. & Q. R. Co.*, 143 S.W. 785, 803 (Mo. 1912); and many others. ([Return](#))

17. *Ex parte Newman*, 9 Cal. 502, 509 (1858). ([Return](#))

18. Hutson, *Religion*, p. 96, quoting from a handwritten history in possession of the Library of Congress, "Washington Parish, Washington City," by Rev. Ethan Allen. ([Return](#))

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20. [The Reports of Committees of the Senate of the United States for the Second Session of the Thirty-Second Congress, 1852-53](#) (Washington: Robert Armstrong, 1853), p. 3. ([Return](#))

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22. [Journal of the Senate of the United States of America Being the Third Session of the Thirty-Seventh Congress](#) (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1863), p. 379, March 2, 1863. ([Return](#))

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24. Abraham Lincoln, [Proclamation Appointing a National Fast Day](#) (March 30, 1863) on the WallBuilders website as originally printed in *The Liberator* on April 24, 1863. [\(Return\)](#)
25. A May 2016 Bing search for this proclamation resulted in 400,000+ hits. [\(Return\)](#)
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29. B. F. Morris, [Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States, Developed in the Official and Historical Annals of the Republic](#) (Philadelphia: George W. Childs, 1864), p. 639. [\(Return\)](#)
30. David J. Brewer, [The United States: A Christian Nation](#) (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1905), p. 12. [\(Return\)](#)
31. David J. Brewer, [The United States: A Christian Nation](#) (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1905), p. 11. [\(Return\)](#)
32. David J. Brewer, [The United States: A Christian Nation](#) (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1905). [\(Return\)](#)
33. David J. Brewer, [The United States: A Christian Nation](#) (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1905), pp. 40, 46. [\(Return\)](#)
34. "[Breakfast in Washington](#)," *Time*, February 15, 1954. [\(Return\)](#)
35. *Vidal v. Girard's Executors*, 43 U. S. 126, 198 (1844). [\(Return\)](#)
36. *U.S. v. Macintosh*, 283 U.S. 605, 625 (1931). [\(Return\)](#)
37. *Church of the Holy Trinity v. U. S.*, 143 U. S. 457, 465, 470-471 (1892). [\(Return\)](#)
38. See for example, *Warren v. U.S.*, 177 F.2d 596 (10th Cir. 1949); *U.S. v. Girouard*, 149 F.2d 760 (1st Cir.1945); *Steiner v. Darby*, *Parker v. Los Angeles County*, 199 P.2d 429 (Cal. App. 2d Dist 1948); *Vogel v. County of Los Angeles*, 434 P.2d 961 (1967). [\(Return\)](#)
39. Harry S. Truman, "[Exchange of Messages with Pope Pius XII](#)," *American Presidency Project*, August 6, 1947. [\(Return\)](#)
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