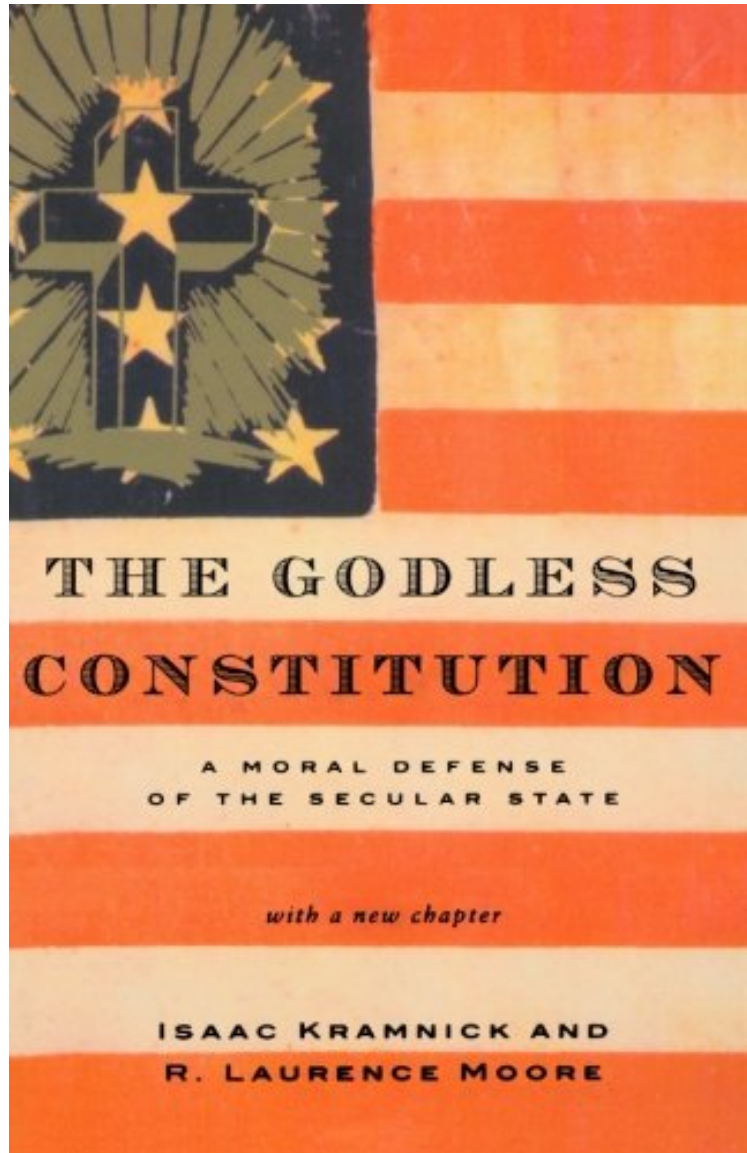


(Read free ebook) The Godless Constitution: A Moral Defense of the Secular State

The Godless Constitution: A Moral Defense of the Secular State

Isaac Kramnick, R. Laurence Moore Ph.D.
*ebooks | Download PDF | *ePub | DOC | audiobook*



[Download](#)

[Read Online](#)

#597787 in Books 2005-08-17 2005-08-17 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.30 x .70 x 5.50l, .43 #File Name: 0393328376208 pages | File size: 36.Mb

Isaac Kramnick, R. Laurence Moore Ph.D. : The Godless Constitution: A Moral Defense of the Secular State before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Godless Constitution: A Moral Defense of the Secular State:

50 of 64 people found the following review helpful. Abrasive Title for a Moderate, Thoughtful BookBy GioAn ill-chosen title, also, since it probably decreases the book's chances of being read by its proper audience. The subtitle - A Moral Defense of the Secular State - is far more suitable. Authors Kramnick and Moore have explicitly written their

'defense' as a respectful appeal to the Christian communities of America, Protestant and Catholic both, to re-evaluate the history of "church-state" separation in the USA, and to re-consider the paramount value of that concept to the integrity of both the government and their own religious faiths. Kramnick and Moore begin their 'moral defense' with a close examination of the historical/cultural context in which the Constitution was written. According to their ample evidence, it was not an oversight that no mention of God or Christ was made in the Constitution. Rather, it was the explicit intention of the chief authors - Madison and, by proxy, Jefferson - to create a secular government. Revisionist and politically-motivated polemicists in recent years have attempted to assert that the Founding Fathers were not at all committed to a "wall of separation" but rather just assumed that America was and forever would be an explicitly Christian nation. The authors write: "It is not true that the founders designed a Christian commonwealth, which was then eroded by secular humanists and liberals; the reverse is true. The framers erected a godless federal constitutional structure, which was then undermined as God entered the first U.S. currency in 1863, then the federal mail service in 1912, and finally the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954." "The reverse is true..." Some of the best evidence for the authors' depiction of the framing of the Constitution comes from the debates in print that preceded the ratification of that Constitution in the various states. The absence of any mention of God was immediately noted and criticized widely, both in the newspapers and from the pulpit. In fact, the "godlessness" of the proposed government was one of the chief arguments of anti-federalists - opponents of ratification - such as Patrick Henry, the inveterate enemy and rival of Thomas Jefferson. Curiously from our 2008 viewpoint, the strongest popular support for this secular state-to-be came from Baptists and Catholics, two communities that realized that they had much to gain from a government not committed to the interests of the established Congregational and Episcopalian squirarchies. The Constitution's first vivid statement of church/state separation was not the First Amendment; it was already embodied in the clause which declares that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." That clause was recognized, the authors show, as a formula already existent in the constitution of Virginia, clearly with the objective of protecting the government from the dominance of any one religious community. The First Amendment, seen in this context, had the objective of protecting any variety of religious conviction - including disbelief - from the government. It was the protection of the dissident conscience from government in the hands of any possible religious orthodoxy that primarily appealed to the sincerest Christians of the founding generation. Moore and Kramnick continue to make their case by examining the thought and actions of Roger Williams and other religious dissidents of the colonial era. In chapter Four, they examine the background of American secularism in "the English roots" of church/state separation, considering the abuses in England which the Americans sought to escape as well as the libertarian philosophy of John Locke and others whose influence was paramount among American intellectuals. Chapter Five turns to the thought of Thomas Jefferson, the one founding father most often revered by both sides of any historical issue. Whatever phrases from Jefferson's pen might be cited, it's clear from his actions - his battle to eliminate religious tests and establishment from the Virginia constitution, his role in the writing of the First Amendment, and his foundation of the University of Virginia as the first secular educational institution in American history - that Jefferson meant exactly what he said when he spoke of the necessity of "a wall of separation" between religion and government. The debate and the resistance to a secular government didn't end with the passage of the Bill of Rights. Kramnick and Moore recount the many explicit efforts of some sincere religious folk - Timothy Dwight, the president of Yale, for instance - to amend the Constitution and/or to achieve some recognition of religious rule in such things as Sunday mail delivery. In each generation of American history, in fact, there were spokesmen for "putting God in the government" and in many cases those same people were the spokesmen for important humanitarian causes - abolition, temperance, universal suffrage, welfare programs, child-labor laws, etc. Moore and Kramnick, in fact, celebrate the vigorous social consciences of the religious reformers, and acknowledge the basic point that religious faith has always and will always provide a major component of what makes a nation strong and fair. However, as the authors argue, the politicization of religion - in previous eras and especially at present - is destructive and dangerous. By breaching the wall of separation politically, by attempting to impose a kind of religious political correctness, effectively a "test of faith" as a qualification for full citizenship, both government and religion run the risk of being corrupted. Chapters 1-8 of this book appeared as a title in 1996. One could easily wish that the book had been more widely read then. Chapter nine is an addition in the second edition, reflecting on the administration of George W Bush. The tone of this chapter is patently less optimistic; the authors are far from happy with the course of Bush's political career, and they are justifiably alarmed for the future. Unfortunately, the people to whom they want and need to address their respectful arguments are very unlikely ever to read them, let alone give them the kind of conscientious consideration they deserve. 13 of 21 people found the following review helpful. Perfect Clarity, Polarizing Name By The Spinozanator This is a book written for a general audience to familiarize them with what is already familiar to historians and political scientists, as clearly stated in "A NOTE ON SOURCES" at the end of the book. It is full of information from original sources, such as Madison's notes, The Federalist Papers, and direct quotes from many of our Founding Fathers. Most of the FF's were among the most educated men in this country and were well acquainted with the hardships that had been imposed on the general public in Europe during the previous 1500 years - because of governments and the predominate religion being so intertwined. Although the FF's all proclaimed to be Christians, or at

least Deists, they represented many different denominations and each state had a certain one that had been given governmental priority. In every case, the controlling denomination in any given state could not resist the temptation to discriminate against the others. Therefore, it's not surprising that the FF's purposefully left God out of it, with very little dissent, as documented in Madison's notes. It's also not surprising that ratification was supported by so many of the church groups that were not in control in their state. Ratification was particularly supported by the Baptists, whose rights had been trampled upon in states controlled by the Anglicans. There is nothing new here - I've read most of it before; however, it is certainly well summarized. This is a very fair book with an unfortunately polarizing name. It considers issues from the late 1700's to current times, and encourages those who believe in a firm separation of church and state to choose their battles. It clearly points out that re-emergence of objections to the Constitution being Godless is nothing new. It was a fight from the very beginning and has never stopped. During some decades, the fight just becomes more acute. However, for anyone literate in English, the Constitution is clear. The FF's intended it to be indifferent toward religion(s) and not favor any one over another. As Jefferson said, "it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." It is no wonder that this book is recommended in Universities for supplemental or even required reading in history and political science classes. DB of 4 people found the following review helpful. A great book that points out the fact that our constitution is godless. By katvilani. Another great book that points out the obvious and not so obvious flaws in the Christian nation myth, I enjoy using it as a reference when discussing politics with some of my friends who unfortunately are immune to any evidence that their cherished Christian nation myth is wrong and very damaging to a free society.

"A timely, well-written and scholarly polemic for the separation of church and state."--Bernard Crick, *The New Statesman* The Godless Constitution is a ringing rebuke to the religious right's attempts, fueled by misguided and inaccurate interpretations of American history, to dismantle the wall between church and state erected by the country's founders. The authors, both distinguished scholars, revisit the historical roots of American religious freedom, paying particular attention to such figures as John Locke, Roger Williams, and especially Thomas Jefferson, and examine the controversies, up to the present day, over the proper place of religion in our political life. With a new chapter that explores the role of religion in the public life of George W. Bush's America, *The Godless Constitution* offers a bracing return to the first principles of American governance.