

Dr. Roger Green, American Christianity,

Session 7, Religion and the American Revolution

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This is Dr. Roger Green in his teaching on American Christianity. This is session 7, Religion and the American Revolution.

I'm on page 13 of the syllabus if that helps. This is the First Great Awakening, and we're finishing up on the First Great Awakening today. We're kind of where we should be in the lecture, so we're grateful for that. Just a reminder, we give a pretty long time to Jonathan Edwards because he was so critical not only to the First Great Awakening but a critical thinker in American Christianity, so we do that.

Then, we talked about three other important leaders. We talked about Frelinghuysen, Tenet, and the importance of George Whitefield. The First Great Awakening was not without pushback.

There were reactions to the First Great Awakening, and so we looked at those reactions, three of them particularly. Now, we're at the results of the First Great Awakening. It had a tremendous impact on American life and culture, not only theologically but also socially, which a lot of people don't realize.

These two things obviously cross over one another, so you can't always make a fine distinction between the theological impact and the social impact, but it's a social contribution. That's where we are. I'll go down the list here.

I forget exactly where we stopped, but I think we mentioned the elevation of the common person, the importance of the laity in the First Great Awakening, and how they got to do things in church life that they had never been able to do before. They could speak in public. They could read the Bible in public.

They could participate in church life. The congregation had always been doing that, but they could participate in church life. That is number two.

Lay activity is stressed. New roles of leadership in the church. The leadership in the church is no longer just the priest or the minister; the leadership in the church is now shared with the laity.

I think we mentioned that one. I think we probably mentioned personal independence in religious life; freedom of choice leads to that kind of personal independence in political life as well. Separation of church and state is very important.

It had been important to people like the Baptists, the Roman Catholics, and some of the Puritans. People who had suffered under state oppression in Europe now come over here, and they for sure want a separation of church and state so that the state cannot control the church. Now, did we get to the new humanitarian impulse? Isn't this where we left off? Let's talk about the new humanitarian impulse, which will be very important for American life and culture. There was the Matthew 22 passage, love God, love your neighbor.

Well, that becomes important in the first Great Awakening. Love God, love your neighbor. Now, who is your neighbor? Well, when John Wesley was asked the question, who is your neighbor, he said, the poorest among you is your neighbor.

The one who is most helpless among you is your neighbor. So, this humanitarian impulse, let me give you just one example of it, and then we'll see this grow and develop in American cultural life with the Second Great Awakening and the revivals that came in the 19th century. One example of this was Whitefield's building of an orphanage in Georgia.

There was a need for an orphanage in Georgia. Who's going to do this? Who's going to take care of these orphans? Whitefield decided that he would take care of them, and he built an orphanage. The orphanage had a long and very interesting history.

We don't have time for all of that now, but it shows the humanitarian impulse of this First Great Awakening and George Whitefield wanting to build the orphanage and make sure that the children were taken care of. So, we're going to see that a lot in our time together. New forms of assembly are very, very important, these new forms of assembly.

Now, the new forms of assembly take two characteristics that we're also going to see politically. The first characteristic is the social context of the assembly. We've already kind of mentioned that.

The social context of the assembly is going to be not confined to a church, a building, or a place, but it's going to be out in the open air. And it's going to be open air where everybody can attend. I mean, you don't have to be a voting member of the church to attend this.

So, the new forms of assembly included a social context that was quite different from anything we've seen before. This is new now. This is different.

And then the second thing about this is the ability in that social context to criticize authority. That happens a little bit, probably even in the First Great Awakening, but it certainly happens politically following the First Great Awakening. People feel that the authority of leadership can be criticized, and they can do it openly and publicly.

So, these new forms of assembly really open up a couple of opportunities here in the First Great Awakening that we're going to kind of carry over. And then the sovereignty of the people. The sovereignty of the people now becomes critical to political office.

So, from what we have seen now, this is a new form of organization. Leadership has been raised in the past only by virtue of one's connections or only by virtue of one's wealth, influence, and power. Well, the sovereignty of the people has become critical.

So, it's the people speaking in public about various things. Here's a quotation that kind of summarizes all of this. I love this quotation because it's so well stated, but consider it as a social event.

So, let's think of it as a social event. The First Great Awakening signifies nothing less than the first stage of the American Revolution. That's a pretty strong statement that this is the first stage of the American Revolution.

Would the American Revolution have taken place if there hadn't been such a strong First Great Awakening in America? Well, we don't know because we do know where history went, but that's a good question and a good way to kind of summarize this as the first stage in the American Revolution. So, lots of things are happening here, and there are lots of results, not only theological but social results as well. So, the First Great Awakening, we could take our 15 weeks on this First Great Awakening.

It was a pretty miraculous thing that happened in American life and culture, and it also helped to shape American life and culture. I wonder if there are any questions or anything that needs to be discussed about Jonathan Edwards, the leadership, what is going on in the First Great Awakening, and what the results were of the First Great Awakening. These people will consider themselves evangelical.

It's a term that came up in the Reformation. The term evangelical came up in the Reformation to kind of, almost in a sense, distinguish Protestantism from Roman Catholicism. The term Wesley uses very strongly in England.

And what's happening in England is the Wesleyan Revival that's going on at the same time as the First Great Awakening. So, these people will think of themselves as evangelical, and that's a term they'd be familiar with and perhaps sometimes use for themselves. Now, the term is going to come back. The term that we understand as evangelical is going to come back again a bit in the Second Great Awakening, but it's really going to come in the middle of the 20th century.

So, we're going to see some history, but yes, this would be a term they'd be familiar with. If someone said to Jonathan Edwards, you're an evangelical, he would say, yeah, I am an evangelical; this is what I believe, and this revival is an evangelical revival like the Wesleyan Revival in England. So yeah, there is something else about the First Great Awakening; what's happening here?

Okay, are we all set with that? Let's move on. I'm on page 13 of the syllabus. So now we're going to move on to lecture number five, Religion and the American Revolution.

And we're going to look first at deism, a very important movement that will affect us, both religiously and socially. Then, we're going to look at the political and religious theories of the Founding Fathers. And then, we're going to see the reaction of the churches to the American Revolution, and we'll end by talking a little bit about church attendance during the time of the Revolution.

So start with deism. Okay, so where are we with deism? All right, first of all, let's take the 18th century just in general. The 18th century was known as the Age of Reason or the Age of Rationality.

I mean, it starts in the 17th century, but then it comes over into the 18th century. So that's kind of a broad top definition, sure. But I think it's helpful for us.

Age of reason, age of rationality. Okay, now let me mention three things that are characteristic of the 18th century, three things that helped to shape and form the 18th century Age of Reason. Okay, first of all, there is certainly kind of an exaltation of reason.

We have the beginning of modern philosophy, the exaltation of reason, the importance of reason. And with that importance of reason, sometimes there is skepticism about the Bible, about the church, about organized Christianity as appearing to be unreasonable, as appearing to be not being able to be measured with what is reasonable, what is rational. Okay, so that's one thing, kind of rise of philosophy along with that, at times, a skepticism about historic Christianity.

Okay, number two, second kind of characteristic of this age of reason, and that is kind of a way of doing theology. We call this natural theology. Natural theology is basically a theology; you might remember this from most of you who may have taken the theology course, but natural theology is a theology based on reason and based on observation of the natural world.

So, natural theology really comes into play in the 18th century in a very powerful way. So, what we know about God and what we know about his world is done through observation. And what natural theology and what people in the 18th century

said was, look at the world. There's beauty, there's order, and there's design in the world.

That's what we're seeing in the world. Therefore, there must be someone who created this. So natural theology is just looking at that.

What they didn't always recognize, however, was that natural theology has two flaws, and they didn't always recognize the flaws in natural theology. The number one flaw is that it kind of does away with revealed theology or disclosure of God in the scriptures or how God reveals himself in the person of Christ. So, they didn't really come to grips with that. That theology is revealed.

What about the revelation? What about theology as revelation? The second thing they didn't really come to grips with is really the question of if you're going to rely on natural theology, if that's what you're going to build your theology on, beauty, order, design of the universe, then what happens to that theology when there are earthquakes and floods and tsunamis and diseases which wipe out a couple hundred thousand people and so forth? Where is your natural theology, then? Is this reasonable? Is this rational? Does this give you a good view of who God is? So, natural theology had its real limitations, and people didn't always kind of recognize those limitations. If you're going to rely only on natural theology, you've got to kind of come to grips with those limitations. So that's number two in terms of shaping the age of reason.

So, number one is philosophy. Number two is a natural theology, and then we've got a third. Basically, the early deists that we're going to talk about sometimes did appeal to scripture, but eventually, they let scripture go.

The Bible is out, and our own reasoning ability is in, and that's what natural theology is shaped by our reason. The third thing is that in the 18th century, there were years and years and years of religious wars in Europe. There had been all kinds of religious wars between Catholics and Protestants in Europe in the previous couple of centuries, and in the 18th century, in a sense, people were kind of fed up with that.

People thought, if this is Christianity, I don't want anything to do with it, you know? So, there's kind of a backing away from those religious conflicts and saying, let's see if we can develop a theology and a moral life that doesn't allow for this kind of thing. So, people are fed up with the religious conflicts and the wars of the previous century or two. People want a more reasonable kind of approach to life and to religion.

So, the age of reason is a kind of reaction to what had been going on before. Okay, now, what happens is once in a while you get, you know, in this course, you look at

the, sometimes you get the right person with the right idea and the right events kind of coalescing. Well, that happens with a man by the name of John Locke.

John Locke is very, very important to philosophy, theology, Christianity, and so forth. Okay, now, John Locke comes along. There are his dates, and he wrote a book called *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. So, the title of the book itself is going to kind of give away what he is going to say in the book, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*.

Okay, so Locke's premise in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* is that the basic truths of Christianity are rational. You can discern them by your reason. They are rationally and can be rationally apprehended. So, the basic truths of Christianity are simple, basic, and reasonable.

And that's, and he's going to make a case kind of, he's going to make a case for that. Okay, he relies heavily, of course, on natural theology because partly he makes his case from the beauty of the world, the order of the world, the symmetry of the world, and the design of the world. So he's going to partly make his case based on that kind of natural theology.

But Christianity, as far as he's concerned, is basically reasonable. Okay, now someone like John Locke, however, is still using the Bible. This answers these questions in a sense, but he's still using the Bible.

He hasn't totally thrown out the Bible. But followers of John Locke, as you get into the 18th century, who will believe these same kinds of things and believe that Christianity is reasonable and rational, will eventually throw out the Bible. They feel they can develop everything they need to know about God and his universe and about our life from our reason, from just looking around.

But John Locke becomes very, very important in terms of spelling out what eventually will be known as deism. So, we do want to mention his name. Okay, so along comes a movement called deism.

Okay, and so we're still on A here, deism. Along comes a movement called deism. Okay, let's define deism.

I think we've already probably mentioned this in the course. But deism is not a religion. Deism is a kind of religious philosophy.

Deism is kind of a religious worldview that really began in England through the writings of people like John Locke. It begins in England and comes over into America, and then comes over to the colonies, of course. So that is deism.

And you know deism from God is up here and we are down here. God wound up the world like a clock, and it's ticking away. So now, just to make sure we understand, the opposite of deism is theism.

So, theism is the opposite of deism. Deism is God up here, and we're down here. Theism is God is up here, but he is concerned for our lives.

He has broken into our world in the person of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and there's a personal relationship with God here. That's theism. Okay, but let's go back to the deists here.

So, they start to shape themselves in the 17th and 18th centuries. All right, let me give a few of their beliefs that were developed that will kind of highlight what deism is all about. Okay, number one, they are monotheists.

They do believe in God. So, they are monotheists. They're not pagans.

They don't believe in a lot of gods. So, they are monotheists, but of course, they would deny the Trinity. So, they are basically Unitarians, and that's the denomination into which they'll eventually evolve.

Okay, so that's one belief of the deists, that belief in one God. All right, the deists, they would have to say that there is sin in the world because how could you have to have blinders on not to say that? They have to say there is sin in the world, but that sin is not original sin. That sin just comes from the free will that we have to say yes or no to God, but they acknowledge that there is sin in the world.

They'd have to do that. Okay, but that leads to number three. However, what they want to emphasize, what the deists want to emphasize is morality and ethics.

Is it possible to live the good life? Is it possible to practice virtue? Is it possible to live a moral life? And the deist answer to that is absolutely yes, and it is because you don't have any original sin obstructing those opportunities to do that. You may have some sin in your own life by the freedom of your will, but you don't have an original sin that's going to obstruct you from doing that. So, they really do call people to a virtuous life, to a moral life, and they think that's proper.

Number four for the deists, they do. The deists, especially the early deists, did expect that there was an afterlife. They did feel that virtue could not be completely rewarded in this life. A good moral life cannot be completely rewarded here, and so there is an afterlife.

And they're willing even to say that there are rewards and punishments in the afterlife. Is there a heaven and a hell in the afterlife? Well, that gets a little fuzzy, but

there certainly are rewards and punishments in the afterlife, no doubt about that. Now, eventually, remember deism is only a religious philosophy.

It's not a denomination yet, but eventually, when it evolves into Unitarianism, it will also evolve into Universalism. So, deism is finally going to evolve into Unitarianism and then Universalism, which teaches that all people are going to enjoy the rewards of heaven no matter what their life is like here on earth. Everybody's going to go and be with God.

God is going to set everything right in a sense. And it's no surprise that in the 20th century, the middle of the 20th century, the Unitarians and the Universalists, which started as two separate denominations, are going to merge here in America in the 20th century so that they are the Unitarian-Universalist denomination.

So those two aspects of deism are going to come together. So those are some things that the deists taught, some things that they believed. Now, there are a couple of writers, therefore, who didn't, and remember, we said in answer to the question, the early deists did not want to throw out the Bible.

They wanted to come to grips with the Bible. They wanted to use the biblical text. So, I want to mention two important writers here.

First is John Toland. These are both British writers, and both of these writers are going to basically defend deism. He wrote a book called Christianity Not Mysterious.

And the thesis of his book is that there is nothing in the Bible that is above our reason. There is nothing in the biblical text that is out of harmony with reason. Now, if there happen to be some things in the biblical text that are out of harmony with reason, then maybe we should get rid of those texts.

But what we want is Christianity, not mystery. We don't want any mystery. And so John Toland wrote his book, and then he's followed by kind of what became known as the deist Bible, Matthew Tindall, Christianity as Old as Creation.

Christianity as Old as Creation. In this book, what he does is uphold the use of reason to understand the scripture rather than the use of revelation, rather than understanding the scripture as a revelation. So, the scripture is not a revelation from God to us.

The scripture is some word of God to us, but the word of God that we can apprehend with our reason. So, Christianity is as Old as Creation. For someone like Tindall, what do you see when you look at creation? Order, beauty, and design.

Well, that's true of Christianity as well. Christianity is a religion of order, beauty, and design. And it's not irrational and it's not unreasonable.

So Toland and Tindall had a tremendous impact through their writings on English Unitarianism and English Deism, but then, of course, Americans were reading Toland and Tindall as well. So, it became really pretty important. Let's stay with A for just a minute, Deism.

Orthodoxy now is going to start responding to Deism. Orthodoxy is going to start pushing back on Deism, and being a little worried that Deism is so popular is so claiming the hearts and minds of people, kind of winning the battle. So, Orthodoxy is going to push back.

Let me mention three ways in which Orthodoxy pushes back. Number one, the first way Orthodoxy pushes back is to acknowledge some of the Deist message. To say to the Deists, we agree with some of what you are teaching.

We acknowledge that. There is an order, a beauty, and a design to the world. And we see this in the Old Testament.

We see this in the writers of the Psalms. We see this in some places in the New Testament. So, the first way that they respond is by trying to find some common ground with the Deists and say some of what you are teaching is right.

And Calvin himself said one of the ways in which we know God is by looking at the world around us. So that is one way that they respond, trying to find that kind of common ground. Number two, a second way in which they respond is to defend the Bible.

Or I should say, maybe it would be better to defend the whole biblical record. So Orthodoxy responded by saying the biblical record is not just a reasonable understanding of the world and God's design, but the biblical record is filled with miracles and prophecies and the ultimate God becoming flesh, the ultimate mystery in a sense, God becoming flesh. So we acknowledge that maybe the Deists see some of the biblical text, but we want to say there is another part of the biblical text that they are not acknowledging and that they should be because that is the whole Bible.

So, the whole Bible is not just a rational understanding of who God is. The Bible is also, at times, well, filled with miracles and other ways of God working that we don't always understand, and so forth. So that is the second way that they kind of defended it.

A third way was the way that Orthodoxy defended it. There was a man who wrote a book called A Case for Reason. The third way Orthodoxy defended it was to say Christianity is faith-seeking understanding.

So, a third way is to say that we agree that reason is very important. We agree that the use of our mind in understanding God and what God wants for us is very important. So, the third way Orthodoxy says reason, we agree, faith seeking understanding.

However, part of this Orthodoxy said to remember that there are limits to our rationality. Remember that there are limits to our reasoning ability. Remember that there is mystery in the way in which God works, and nothing more mysterious than God coming in the flesh in the person of Christ, and we rejoice in that by faith.

So, a case for reason, yeah, you can make a case for reason, but there are limits to that reason. So, Orthodoxy starts to push back. Orthodoxy starts to respond to the deists.

So, they start to have some bit of conflict here between the deists and Orthodoxy. One of the people who pushed back, of course, was Jonathan Edwards in responding to the deists. Okay, so that's A, the deists.

Are there any questions about these folks? They are very important. Some of you may want to write about the deists in a paper, but are there any questions about these people? Okay, now let's go to B and talk about the political and religious theory of the Founding Fathers. Okay, so here's where we're going to go with this.

All right, I love my job. I love being at Gordon. I love my job.

And I'm going to say some things that not all of you are going to agree with and probably think are heretical, and maybe the Board of Trustees should have a word with me. Sometimes, you wish you taught math like two, and two is four, and that's a nice thing. So, I'm going to lay out the case and then see if you agree or disagree with it.

You push back on this. Don't just swallow this. If you don't agree with this and if you've got a good reason not to agree with it, be sure to tell me.

So, okay, so we're going to do okay with this? We're going to do all right. So, bless your hearts. Okay, political and religious theory of the Founding Fathers.

All right, the Founding Fathers, so here's my thesis in a sense. Most of the Founding Fathers, not all, but most of what we call the Founding Fathers were not evangelical Christians. They were not what we would call evangelical Christians.

There is no evidence that they were evangelical Christians. And I'm talking about the Founding Movers and Shakers. And I'll use Thomas Jefferson in just a minute as an example of that.

These people were very influenced by the deists. And they were very influenced by deist thinking, both religious thinking and political thinking. And so you cannot assume that the Founding Fathers were great evangelical, Bible-believing, church-going Christians.

Unfortunately, the evidence will not support that. Okay, so let's use Thomas Jefferson as an example. Thomas Jefferson was himself a deist.

Deism was very influential in his life. A certain political theory was also very influential in his life, which was also deistic. Thomas Jefferson, just to show you how much of a deist he was, wrote the Jefferson Bible.

I don't know if any of you have ever seen the Jefferson Bible, but if you've seen the Jefferson Bible, Thomas Jefferson, what he did, he took the Bible, especially the New Testament and especially the Gospels, and what he did, he cut out from the Bible the miracles of Jesus. He cut out the miracles because he felt that the miracles were irrational and unreasonable and couldn't be supported or defended. He liked some of the good things that Jesus said.

So, you keep some things like the Beatitudes in the text. But the Jefferson Bible really is a Bible that is carefully edited, I would say, to show Jesus. Jesus ends up being kind of like an 18th-century great thinker.

So, the miracles are out. Well, if you cut out the miracles, you do have some problems here. And if you cut out things like the death on the cross and the resurrection, so you've got some basic problems here.

But Jefferson wanted a very tame Jesus. He wanted a very rational 18th-century Jesus, and that's what he ended up with, with the Jefferson Bible. So Jefferson is a good example of this, being kind of a thorough deist himself.

So, I think, I mean, you tell me if he's not and give me some good supporting evidence that he's not, but I want to talk about this. But anyway, let's go to Rousseau and the importance of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. So, here's Rousseau writing in Europe, and he's writing a thing called the Social Contract.

And you've certainly, well, how many have read the Social Contract for other courses? For maybe political studies courses, it would be political studies courses or

things like that. So Social Contract. If you haven't read Social Contract, I'm going to help you out by giving you some points from the book.

So, if you haven't read it, we're going to get through Social Contract. Social Contract was a very influential text in the 18th century and very influential upon Jefferson and the other founding fathers. You'll find that this is basically a deistic type of text.

It's not only political, but in a sense, it will be religious as well. Okay, it's Monday morning, though; you need a break. So, take a break.

Now, let's take Social Contract. Most of you haven't read it, so I'm going to just mention a few things from Social Contract that became important to our founding fathers. Alright, first, number one, very important.

In Social Contract, Rousseau denies, he denies any theory of the divine right of kings. So, he denies any theory of the divine right of kings. There is no divine right of kings to rule, as they are ruling over here in Europe, where he was writing the book.

He really proposes a very radical, kind of secular view of political leadership. And that secular view of political leadership is that it comes from the people. So there's no divine right of kings, but leadership comes from the people.

So that becomes very important. So that's kind of number one. Alright, number two, the general will of the people is what kind of continues to govern the people through the laws.

What laws should we erect for the government? Well, we should elect laws that come from the general will of the people. We do not follow laws that are imposed on us by some monarch. We follow the laws of government and the laws of life that the will of the people decides are good for the benefit of the people.

So, it's not anything imposed on us. We are the ones who developed this. Okay, number three, Social Contract, what is the Social Contract? Social Contract has two sides to it.

It's like a coin with two sides. Okay, the Social Contract is, first of all, individual freedom must be guarded. On the one hand, one side of the coin is individual freedom must be guarded and safeguarded.

On the other hand, however, there must be a just government that has to care for the common good of the people. So, we've got a safeguard of individual freedom on the one hand, but on the other hand, there is a just government that needs to watch out for the common good. Okay, so that's number three.

Okay, number four, this book, number four, I just want to, this book is, it's hard to, it's hard to say how influential this book was on the thinking of the political leaders here as the revolution was warming up here in America. This book was very influential in what they were thinking about as they were under what they considered to be the tyranny of England. As they are under the tyranny of England and the tyranny of a monarch, and what they're beginning to think about, and no less thinking about it than right in Boston, which was kind of one of the hearts of the revolution, but they're thinking about these ideas, and they're applying them to American civil life.

So, the book itself is really, really very important book. Okay, so under the political and religious theory of the founding fathers, then what is the documentary? What's the documentary appeal that these people have? So, once I read it to you, I think we get this, but notice that the documentary appeal was not to the Bible. The founding fathers, as the revolution is warming up, they are not appealing to the Bible.

They're not, and the appeal is not to some kind of divine revelation in the Bible, which has given us a reason for our cause. The appeal is to what? It's to self-evident. So here we go.

Now, this will sound familiar to you. We hold these truths to be self-evident. So, the appeal is philosophically to self-evident truths.

We hold these truths to be self-evident. All men are created equal, and they're endowed by their what? By their creator. That's a very deistic term.

That's kind of a code word. They're endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. So, the appeal is a self-evident, reasonable appeal.

We hold these truths to be self-evident. So, they didn't say we hold these truths to be biblical. We're opening the Bible, and we're finding these truths in the Bible, which they didn't say, and they are given by their redeemer God.

They're given by God, who came in Christ to rule. So, that is the appeal of the founding fathers. So, we want to be sure we understand that.

Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Now here, that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, not by divine, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter, to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundations and sub-principles and organizing its powers in such form as it to them shall seem most likely to affect their safety and happiness. So, this is not an appeal to the revelation of God

in a sacred text in the Bible by which we are kind of forming and shaping what we're doing here.

Now, let me just follow this through for just a minute, and then I want you to tell me where I'm wrong here. Along with this, with the founding fathers, comes the American kind of constitutional life breaking with religion now. So, we are breaking with religion as we form this new world in the revolution.

So, there is the church on the one hand, and there is the state on the other hand, and so the constitution rejects all religious tests for office holders. There are no religious tests for officeholders in the Constitution. Anyone can hold a public office by the consent of the people in the constitution, but they don't necessarily have to be religious people.

So, what happens is that Christianity flourishes under this separation of church and state. So, Christianity, this is kind of a Judeo-Christian flourishing that's going on here, even at the time of the revolution. We'll talk about that later.

Now, here's my final word on this. It's possible to call America a Christian country or a Christian nation. That is possible.

It's possible to call America a Christian nation. But it's only possible to call America a Christian nation if by that you mean that there are a lot of Christians in the nation. If by that you mean there are a lot of Christians who reside here, and also if by that you mean there is kind of a Judeo-Christian kind of life that's been developed in American life and culture.

So, if that's what you mean by calling America a Christian nation, then that's fine. If you mean that the founding fathers intended to establish it as a Christian nation, we will use the term Christian as in the term evangelical if you mean that they intended to establish this country as an evangelical Christian nation based on the Bible and the whole Bible, which would have to include the incarnation and so forth.

If that's what you mean, then I don't think that's a case that you can make. So, what I'd like to finish up is now to contrast this with two things. So, if I'm right, maybe I'm wrong.

So maybe I am wrong. So, you need to tell me where I'm wrong. But contrast this now, if I am correct, contrast this to two things.

Number one, contrast this to the way the Puritans would have established this new nation. The Puritans would have established the new nation in a different way, wouldn't they? Because the Puritans established, they wanted a city set on a hill to

be a kind of godly representation of what God wanted for his people here. So, contrast this to the Puritans.

They never would have used this kind of language. They never would have established a new nation talking about certain kinds of rights of man. They would have established a new nation based on the Bible.

But they weren't establishing a theocracy here, so the Puritans didn't have the intention of establishing a new nation. Also, number two contrasts this to Roger Williams' understanding of what he was doing in Providence and in Rhode Island. Because what he is doing there, he believes, is based on the Bible.

Now, it had the whole tenet of religious freedom, not just religious toleration but religious freedom. But Roger Williams, what he was doing, the world that he was establishing in Rhode Island, was, as far as he was concerned, a very godly world. And it was based on the scriptures.

It wasn't just based on self-evident truths. It was based on the Bible. But these people are different.

These people do not have the same view of scripture or the same view of God that the Puritans had or that Roger Williams had. They are basically deists who have a view of God as the creator of God. And we're living a moral, rational life here on earth.

And that creator God expects us to do some good things in the establishment of government. And throwing off English tyranny, of course. So that's the case here.

So now tell me where I am wrong here. Where am I wrong? The Founding Fathers were basically Anglican in terms of church membership. The problem with someone like George Washington, who was Anglican, was that he very, very, very rarely went to church.

We have very few records of George Washington actually going to church. So, these people are basically Anglicans. They are in terms of their background.

But the first Anglican church in America, I mean the first Unitarian church in America, we're going to walk right by it, you've walked by it if you've done the Freedom Trail, is King's Chapel. 1785, it became Unitarian. So, Anglican churches, even at that time, were moving toward Unitarianism, toward deism, which eventually became Unitarianism.

So, they are Anglicans, but that's not saying much. The fact that they had this church tradition and traditional church background still did not say much about their real, deep-seated religious life. So yeah, so they were, basically, not all.

Remember, the signer of the Declaration of Independence in Rhode Island was Quaker. Something else. Okay, what about, yeah, Matt, help us out here.

I certainly agree that as an educated, technically literate Catholic, would you say that the common, for example, need to deal with heaven? Right, yes. I would say that the common people, apart from the leadership, are more kind of orthodox religious at this time. It is unfortunate, however, in spite of that, we'll see this much later.

It's unfortunate that in spite of that, church attendance starts to decline rapidly as you get closer to the time of the Revolution. And here we had just had this First Great Awakening, a tremendous awakening in American public life, and yet you have this decline coming up to the Revolution. So, I would say that common people, everyday people, are going to church.

They are Christians and so forth. But the thinkers, the ones who thought this through, and the common people are glad to kind of tie into this in a way because they know enough about the religious wars. They know enough about when a state controls the church, and they don't want to go back to that.

So they are separated from church and state people anyway, generally speaking. So, they will buy into this. Something else about the Founding Fathers.

It's moving toward all the way to Deism. If you get Jefferson wanting to rewrite the Bible and to cut out the miracles, you are making pretty strong strides away from orthodox Christianity into a pretty full-fledged Deistic kind of thinking. Do you choose Jefferson because he did that? Yeah, I chose Jefferson because he is also a brilliant writer, and the former shaped some of this thinking in his language, which is magnificent language.

So yeah, I chose him because maybe he would be the one we would be most familiar with. But what about going to Benjamin Franklin, for example? Are you finding in Benjamin Franklin a very religious, orthodox, grounded person who believes in incarnation? No, you are not finding that with Benjamin Franklin.

You are finding basically a deist who wanted to live a good moral life and gave us a lot of good things to think about like the early bird catching the worm. But you are not talking about a person who is grounded in the scriptures, in the church, or in the life of the church. Do you have one more question? Yeah, sure.

At that time when Jefferson became president. When Jefferson became president, right? And so, I'm kind of wondering, like, between the Adams administration, Federalists, Jefferson, and the people who wanted to use Jefferson in political ideology, if there was a noticeable religious difference? I would say no, but I'm ready to listen to people who want, because I would say that Deism was basically the thinking of the leadership.

And even if the leadership changed and certain views change, I think we're still basically talking about, you know, Deists. So that's the case I want to make. But have any of you ever heard of the book *The Light and the Glory*? Who's heard of the book? Hands for *The Light and the Glory*, hearing about it.

No? Okay, so Ted and I have heard about this book. So, there are no hands for *The Light and the Glory*, hearing about it. *The Light and the Glory* is a very interesting book, and I've heard the author speak.

And he's a little bit upset with people like me teaching this stuff. And so in *The Light and the Glory*, he tries to propose, and you should read *The Light and the Glory*. That would give you kind of the other side of the story.

But he tries to make a point; he tries to propose that the early founding fathers were kind of full-fledged evangelicals and that this business of talking about them as Deists is not a good thing to do. Well, there was, yeah, there was, or the fellow I often point to is the Quaker in Rhode Island who would, I think, even though he had Quaker beliefs, they were pretty deep-rooted beliefs in Christ and the inner light of Christ and so forth. So, yeah.

John Witherspoon was a member of the clergy. Right. So, he had an interest.

The thing about Witherspoon is like Charles Chauncey a little earlier. Charles Chauncey was a member of the clergy but a critic of the First Great Awakening, as we mentioned, and he eventually evolved into Unitarianism. So, some of these people are moving away from Orthodoxy religiously as well.

But yes, we can find people that we would consider to be evangelicals during this time. I'm just trying to make the case that the movers and the shakers, no pun intended, we haven't talked about the Shakers yet, but the movers and the shakers were people who were deistic and used the language of Rousseau. They're not using the language of the Bible.

They're using the language of social contract when they are setting up the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Yes, I think what's happening is that deism is a compelling intellectual force in Europe, and it comes over into America through these people who are well-educated and well-read. Remember

Jefferson spent how long in France? These people are very sophisticated, intellectual powerhouses in a sense in our culture.

So, I think deism had a real appeal here, too. Question from the audience. No, right.

That's a good question. I think two things. Number one, certainly the pilgrims, the Puritans, the Congregationalist Roger Williams, they thought in terms, they wouldn't have used this language.

They would have used much more biblical language if they had actually founded a country, which they weren't. But if they were, they wouldn't have used theocracy language either because I think they basically thought that it pertained only to Israel. But they would have used this city set on a hill by God kind of language.

So, they weren't kind of in tune with this. Certainly, there were people during the revolution who looked back to that and thought of it as a Christian nation in that way. But I don't think the leadership was.

I think the leadership was giving us a new vision for this. And part of the vision, of course, was a separation of church and state. That was also part of the vision for we're developing a whole new country, a whole new world here.

But now, history goes forward into the 19th century and into the 20th century, and we certainly have people who look back to the founding fathers as trying to found a Christian nation. I think they were founding a nation based on Judeo-Christian ethical principles and a foundation there. But I just don't find that their language, their language kind of gives away to me what they were all about.

You said that the separation of church and state was Roger Worley's. Right. Did you say the founding fathers were? I think the Founding Fathers were still British.

And we're throwing out the British. The British saw the British world as still the world where the state controls the church. And they don't want that.

And they are glad to allow for the flourishing of Christianity in America and even the flourishing of other religions. The first synagogue in America was founded. Who's modern Jewish culture, people? We got five seconds. Modern Jewish culture, anybody? Where was the first Jewish synagogue founded in America? In Rhode Island.

This is not surprising because of religious freedom. So, they're glad to let religion flourish. No doubt about that.

We'll pick this up on Wednesday. You can let me know how heretical I really am on Wednesday, and then we'll move on from there.

This is Dr. Roger Green in his teaching on American Christianity. This is session 7, Religion and the American Revolution.