



Is America a Christian nation? Was it ever?

That was the topic of a debate last October between E. Ray Moore, president of Frontline Ministries, and Herb Silverman, president of the Secular Coalition for America and professor at the College of Charleston. Sponsored by the Pastafarians, a USC student organization for atheists and agnostics, the event drew Christians and non-Christians alike to consider Moore's defense of America's Christian foundation and Silverman's denial of it.

"My goal was to defend the well-documented historical and spiritual truths lived out by our Founding Fathers, proving that America was indeed founded as a Christian nation," Moore says. "Although our country has ceased to honor some of the biblical principles that informed its foundation, much of America's Christian heritage remains. These facts cannot be debated away."

Both men approached their podiums with considerable qualifications for the debate. Dr. Silverman serves on the boards of the American Humanist Association and Atheist Alliance International and has debated similar topics at Oxford University. Early in 2009, he advocated the concept of the "godless Constitution" with an opinion editorial in the *Washington Post*. Nineteen years previously, he successfully sued the State of South Carolina to remove its religious oath for civil office holders.

Long a student of American history, Ray Moore earned master's degrees in divinity and theology from Grace Theological Seminary, served nineteen years as an Army Reserve chaplain (Lt. Col.), and

spent eight years as a campus pastor at Purdue University. His Frontline Ministries is a nonprofit Christian outreach based in Columbia.

The debate, held in Belk Auditorium at USC's Darla Moore School of Business, focused primarily on "the godless Constitution idea" and "the separation of church and state myth," Moore says.

In defending his position on the first of these issues, Silverman claimed he'd give a thousand dollars to anyone who could show him the name of God in the Constitution. Moore rebutted with the phrase "in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-seven" from the signature page of the Constitution, then added a second, although indirect, reference to God found in Article I, Section 7: "Sundays excepted," which implicitly acknowledges Sunday as the day of Christian worship.

Silverman countered that "in the year of our Lord" was a cultural, not a religious, way of expressing the year and that it held no more religious connotation for our Founding Fathers than "Thursday" (Thor's Day) holds for us in 2009.

In indirect rebuttal, Moore pointed out the organic connection between the Declaration of Independence and our Constitution. "The Declaration contains numerous Christian references, like 'Laws of Nature and of Nature's God,' 'Supreme Judge of the World,' and 'divine Providence.' Such phrases in our founding documents, including 'in the year of our Lord,' were not without meaning to our Founding Fathers."

While there's no creed in the Constitution, Moore pointed out, it does contain an implicit Christian world view in its governmental structure: the judicial, legislative, and executive branches. Moore

Above: Chaplain Ray Moore, left, and Dr. Herb Silverman debate before an audience at USC.

By Rosanne McDowell/Photography by Joaquin Fernandez, The Lighthouse

held that this “separation of powers” idea comes directly from Isaiah 33:22, which says, “For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our King . . .”

More direct evidence of the Christian underpinnings of America’s founding years, said Moore, may be found in the Treaty of Paris, negotiated in 1783 to end the American Revolution. The treaty begins, “In the name of the most holy and undivided Trinity.”

Rev. Ed Cheek of Columbia, who attended the debate, felt both Moore and Silverman prepared and argued well and were well received by the audience. “Each man represented his position ably,” he said, “but in these challenging times when God’s truth is under constant attack, I’m especially thankful God has raised up spokesmen like Ray Moore, men who are willing to combat error and take a bold stand.”

Moore was most encouraged by what happened after the debate. At least three attendees asked to hear more about Christ. “I talked to one student a good while,” Moore said. “He came up to me—he was a member of the Pastafarians—and said, ‘I think I’m going to have to read the Bible as literature.’ I smiled and told him, ‘Be careful. It’s powerful, and the Holy Spirit energizes and uses the Scriptures. You might get converted and not mean to.’ He seemed concerned. As we continued to talk, I tried to explain how God works to draw men to Himself.”

Frontline Ministries gave out literature at the event, including Doug Wilson’s book *Letter from a Christian Citizen* plus CDs and copies of Rev. Det Bowers’ booklet “Has a Nation Changed Gods?”

Why should Christians bother to answer the accusations of atheists and other unbelievers? Ray Moore says the Lord commands it:

“Dear friends . . . contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 1:3). Moore offers this take



on the importance of engaging the culture for Christ:

“Debates on origins, Christian history, and the existence of God do have apologetic value in dealing with non-Christians, but they are even more helpful to Christians. In our culture, secular humanists have been successful in convincing many believers that America has no unique Christian heritage and that if it does have such a heritage, it’s not important to Christians today. A Christian people robbed of its history is easily manipulated by every wind of doctrine. I took on the debate to demonstrate there is a Christian history for America and that what we have left is worth defending.”^{ROC}

To obtain a DVD of the debate,
visit www.exodusmandate.org.

What would you say?

Chaplain Ray Moore offers some arguments likely to be presented by those who deny America’s Christian heritage. Possible rebuttals follow.

Argument: Most of our Founding Fathers were deists, not Christians.

Rebuttal: Secularists emphasize a very small minority of “Enlightenment Founders” while failing to acknowledge the Founders who comprised the Christian majority. For example, Dr. Benjamin Rush, father of American medicine, and Rev. John Witherspoon, president of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton), were strong Bible-believing Christians. Of the 55 delegates to the Constitutional Convention, 50 were members of an orthodox Christian denomination, according to Professor M.E. Bradford in his book *A Worthy Company*. Even Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, not orthodox Christians, made public statements showing their reliance on God’s providence, which is not a deistic belief.

Argument: Our system of government was never meant to support or endorse any religion, including Christianity. Therefore, we should keep the “wall of separation between church and state” strong, as envisioned by Thomas Jefferson.

Rebuttal: While our Founding Fathers did not want any specific denomination to become the established American church, they did intend for Christian principles to undergird our law. Strong proof of this contention, as pointed out by author Bob Dutko: “On December 3, 1803 . . . President Jefferson . . . ordered the extension of the 1787 Act of Congress that designated areas of Federal land ‘for the sole use of Christian Indians and the Moravian Brethren Missionaries for the civilizing of the Indians and promoting Christianity.’”

To prepare yourself for defending the truth of America’s Christian heritage, Ray Moore suggests researching the following:

Books:

America’s Christian History: The Untold Story by Gary DeMar.

George Washington’s Sacred Fire by Peter A. Lillback.

Real Threat and Mere Shadow by Daniel Dreisbach.

Web sites:

Foundation for Moral Law (Judge Roy Moore), www.morallaw.org.

Chalcedon Foundation (R.J. Rushdoony), www.chalcedon.edu.

American Vision (Gary DeMar), www.americanvision.org.

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