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The Myth of the Founders' Deism (Chapter One of Did America Have a Christian Founding?)

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CHAPTER 1

THE MYTH OF
THE FOUNDERS'
DEISM¹

*The Founding Fathers were at most deists—they believed
God created the world, then left it alone to run.*

GORDON WOOD, *AMERICAN HERITAGE MAGAZINE*

*The founding fathers themselves, largely deists
in their orientation and sympathy.*

EDWIN GAUSTAD, *A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF RELIGION IN AMERICA*

*The Founding Fathers were . . . skeptical men of the Enlightenment
who questioned each and every received idea they had been taught.*

BROOKE ALLEN, *MORAL MINORITY*

*The God of the founding fathers was a benevolent deity, not far removed
from the God of eighteenth-century Deists or nineteenth-century
Unitarians. . . . They were not, in any traditional sense, Christian.*

MARK A. NOLL, NATHAN O. HATCH, AND GEORGE M. MARSDEN,

THE SEARCH FOR CHRISTIAN AMERICA

America's Founders were philosophical radicals.

MATTHEW STEWART, *NATURE'S GOD: THE HERETICAL*

*ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC*²

Scholars and popular authors regularly assert that America's founders were deists. They support these claims by describing the religious views of the following men: Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Thomas Paine, Alexander Hamilton, and Ethan Allen. On rare occasion, they reach beyond this select fraternity to include another founder, and they almost inevitably concede that not *all* founders were as enlightened as the ones they profile. However, they leave the distinct impression that most founders, and certainly the important ones, were deists.

In the eighteenth century, deism referred to an intellectual movement that emphasized the role of reason in discerning religious truth. Deists rejected traditional Christian doctrine such as the incarnation, virgin birth, atonement, resurrection, Trinity, divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and miracles. For present purposes, this last point is critical; unlike most Christians, deists did not think God intervenes in the affairs of men and nations. In Alan Wolfe's words, they believed that "God set the world in motion and then abstained from human affairs."³ In this chapter, I demonstrate that there is virtually no evidence that America's founders embraced such views.

CIVIC LEADERS WHO PUBLICLY EMBRACED DEISM

Given the numerous powerful and clear claims that the founders were deists, it is striking that there are few instances of civic leaders in the era openly embracing deism or rejecting orthodox Christian doctrines.⁴ In 1725, during his first English sojourn, Benjamin Franklin published an essay entitled “A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain,” in which he concluded that “Vice and Virtue were empty Distinctions.”⁵ Deists emphasized the importance of morality, so the essay is not evidence of deism. But assuming Franklin was serious (often a dangerous assumption), the work is an example of a founder publicly rejecting a basic tenet of orthodox Christianity. Yet it is noteworthy that even as a young man, Franklin rapidly concluded that the essay “might have an ill Tendency,” and he destroyed most copies of it before they could be distributed.⁶

In his autobiography, begun in 1771 and not published until after his death, Franklin acknowledged that he fell under the influence of deism as a young man. He noted his regret that his religious arguments “perverted” some of his friends. In his later years, Franklin may have moved toward more traditional religious views.⁷ In the Constitutional Convention of 1787, he reflected that “the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that *God governs the affairs of men*”⁸ (emphasis original). Three years later, he wrote a letter to Yale president Ezra Stiles in which he affirmed many traditional Christian doctrines, but admitted he had “some doubts” about the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth.⁹ As with many founders, Franklin’s religious beliefs changed throughout his life. It seems reasonable, however, to classify him as a founder who both publicly and privately rejected or questioned some tenets of orthodox Christianity.

Ethan Allen, leader of the Green Mountain Boys, hero of Fort Ticonderoga, and advocate of statehood for Vermont, published the first American book advocating deism in 1784, *Reason: The Only Oracle of Man*. It sold fewer than two hundred copies, and after its publication, Allen played no role in American politics. Even modern authors sympathetic to Allen's views recognize that he was a "disorganized and stylistically clumsy writer," and that the book never achieved great influence.¹⁰

A decade later, Thomas Paine published his famous defense of deism, *The Age of Reason*. Paine was born and raised in England, and lived only twenty of his seventy-two years in America, so one can reasonably ask if he should be counted as an American founder. The book was written and first published in Europe. Although it sold reasonably well in the United States, America's civic leaders' reactions to it were almost uniformly negative.¹¹ Samuel Adams wrote his old ally a personal letter denouncing it, and John Adams, John Witherspoon, William Paterson, and John Jay each criticized the book.¹² Benjamin Rush called it "absurd and impious," Charles Carroll condemned Paine's "blasphemous writings against the Christian religion," and Connecticut jurist Zephaniah Swift wrote that we "cannot sufficiently reprobate the beliefs of Thomas Paine in his attack on Christianity."¹³ Elias Boudinot and Patrick Henry went so far as to write book-length rebuttals of it.¹⁴ When Paine returned to America, he was vilified because of the book. Indeed, with the exception of Jefferson and a few others, he was abandoned by all of his old friends. When he passed away in 1809, he had to be buried on a farm because even the tolerant Quakers refused to let him be interred in their church cemetery; only six mourners came to his funeral.¹⁵

Some founders may have secretly approved of *The Age of Reason*

but criticized it for political reasons. Yet the overwhelmingly negative reaction to the work says a great deal about American religious and political culture in the late eighteenth century. Whatever attraction deism may have had for a select few, clearly the American public was not ready to embrace such teachings or political leaders who advocated heterodox ideas. With the exception of Franklin, Allen, and Paine, I am unaware of any civic leaders in the era who clearly and publicly rejected orthodox Christianity or embraced deism. There may be others, but those who claim the founders were deists give little or no evidence that they exist.

CIVIC LEADERS WHO PRIVATELY EMBRACED DEISM

Thomas Jefferson definitely rejected orthodox Christianity, but he went to great lengths to keep his religious views far from the public. Virtually all the texts that reveal his true beliefs were letters written to family members or close friends, and he often asked that they be kept private; in some cases, they were never sent, presumably because he was not sure the recipients could be trusted. An excellent example is an 1819 missive from Jefferson to William Short, where he rejected doctrines “invented by ultra-Christian sects” such as “the immaculate conception of Jesus, His deification, the creation of the world by Him, His miraculous powers, His resurrection and visible ascension, His corporeal presence in the Eucharist, the Trinity, original sin, atonement, regeneration, election, orders of Hierarchy, etc.”¹⁶

Jefferson was a skeptic, but he realized that publicly advocating his religious views would be political suicide. Indeed, relatively minor lapses from his rule of secrecy, such as when he wrote in *Notes on the State of*

Virginia (1784) that "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," came close to costing him the election of 1800.¹⁷

John Adams was a lifelong Congregationalist who believed it appropriate for the state to support and encourage Christianity. He respected the Bible's moral teachings, as indicated by an 1816 letter where he wrote, "The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount contain my Religion."¹⁸ Yet, in an 1813 letter to his son, he made it clear that he rejected the divinity of Christ: "An incarnate God!!! An eternal, self-existent, omnipresent omniscient Author of this stupendous Universe suffering on a Cross!!! My Soul starts with horror, at the Idea."¹⁹ Like Jefferson, Adams kept his religious views extremely private. Indeed, the public's perception that he was a Calvinist who would impose a national church on the American people contributed to his losing the election of 1800.²⁰ But he nevertheless must be numbered among those founders who privately rejected Christian orthodoxy.

THE OTHER USUAL SUSPECTS

Three other founders are regularly referred to as deists: Washington, Madison, and Hamilton. Yet, to my knowledge, no writer has ever produced a public or private journal entry, letter, or essay showing that these men rejected Christianity or embraced deism. The argument that they did so is based almost entirely on negative evidence, resting on some combination of observations that they seldom used familiar biblical appellations for God or Jesus Christ, did not regularly attend church, chose not to become communicants, and/or did not always act in a moral manner.

In the case of George Washington, for instance, authors such as David Holmes argue that Washington referred to God with “Deistic terms [such] as ‘Providence,’ ‘Heaven,’ ‘the Deity,’ ‘the Supreme Being,’ ‘the Grand Architect,’ ‘the Author of all Good,’ and ‘the Great Ruler of Events.’”²¹ Yet, as I show below, indisputably orthodox Christians regularly used such appellations. On the surface, Washington’s refusal to take communion suggests that he was not a serious Christian; however, as John Fea points out, this “was not uncommon among eighteenth-century Anglicans,” and Washington may have done so because he “did not believe he was worthy to participate in the sacrament.”²²

Writing about Washington’s religious beliefs is a virtual cottage industry, so I cannot assess and engage every argument about his faith here. Yet it is worth reemphasizing that none of the authors who claim Washington was a deist has cited a text where he rejected a basic tenet of orthodox Christianity. I have scoured Washington’s works and have found one possibility, but I believe it should be treated with care. On March 31, 1791, Jefferson drafted and Washington signed a condolence letter to the emperor of Morocco that includes the sentence: “May that God, whom we both adore, bless your Imperial Majesty with long life, Health and Success, and have you always, great and magnanimous Friend, under his holy keeping.”²³ Conflating the God of Christianity and the God of Islam is problematic from a traditional Christian perspective, yet given the diplomatic context, it seems imprudent to read too much into this missive.

Washington is sometimes accused of having an extramarital affair, and there is no doubt that Alexander Hamilton did so.²⁴ Some writers cite such actions as evidence that particular founders were not serious or orthodox Christians. But this line of argument neglects the traditional Christian teaching that even godly men and women continue to struggle with sin and fall short of moral perfection.

Madison was intensely private about his religious beliefs, so those who assert he was a deist often cite secondhand accounts to support their claims. For instance, the Anglican bishop William Meade recollected twenty years after Madison's death, "I was never at Mr. Madison's but once, and then our conversation took such a turn though not designed on my part as to call forth some expressions and arguments which left the impression on my mind that his creed was not strictly regulated by the Bible."²⁵ Such evidence should not be dismissed, but it needs to be treated with caution. In this case, one should not read too much into an "impression" made by someone who visited Madison's home only once. And it is not self-evident what Meade meant by Madison's creed not being "strictly regulated by the Bible."

It should come as little surprise that authors who rely on accounts such as Bishop Meade's often ignore or dismiss secondhand accounts that the founders were pious, orthodox Christians. For instance, John Marshall, the great chief justice, wrote that the general was a "sincere believer in the Christian faith, and a truly devout man."²⁶ Similarly, a Frenchman who knew Washington said, "Every day of the year, he rises at five in the morning; as soon as he is up, he dresses, then prays reverently to God."²⁷ Other similar accounts by people who knew him attest to Washington's piety, but they are regularly ignored by those who would label him a "cool deist" or a "lukewarm Episcopalian."²⁸

Virtually every author who argues that the founders were deists cites Washington, Madison, and Hamilton as examples. Each of these men wrote a great deal, and scholars have recovered many of their papers. Washington's collected papers are projected to fill ninety volumes, Madison's fifty, and Hamilton's twenty-seven.²⁹ Yet contemporary writers have not cited a single instance where these founders clearly rejected a basic tenet of orthodox Christianity or embraced deism. I agree that

some of their actions or inactions suggest, at least at certain points in their lives, that they were not pious, godly men. I also think it highly unlikely that if Washington were alive today he “would freely associate with the Bible-believing branch of evangelical Christianity that is having such a positive influence upon our nation,” as Tim LaHaye asserted.³⁰ To question whether these founders were deists is not to claim that they were pious, evangelical Christians. Yet it is a different thing altogether to make the affirmative claim that they were deists. In the absence of more compelling evidence, students of the founding should avoid, or at least carefully qualify, such assertions.

BUT SURELY THERE MUST BE OTHERS

For reasons of space I have focused on civic leaders usually discussed by those who claim that the founders were deists. Other founders occasionally put forward as deists include Benjamin Rush, Gouverneur Morris, Timothy Pickering, Joel Barlow, James Monroe, George Wythe, Thomas Young, and, prior to his 1808 conversion, Noah Webster.³¹ I will not discuss these men here, but I will note, first, that in most cases there is little attempt to present evidence that they were deists; and, second, my own investigations reveal that in many instances the case is quite weak (usually relying on negative evidence). Because literally hundreds of men played important roles in the War of Independence and the creation of America’s constitutional order, other deists will likely be discovered. But given the numerous, regular, and unqualified claims that “most” founders were deists, it is remarkable how little *evidence* there is that more than a handful of founders merit this distinction.

WAIT A MINUTE . . .

So far I have considered evidence, or the lack thereof, that the founders embraced deism or rejected basic tenets of orthodox Christianity. Before proceeding, I should note that if deism includes the idea that "God set the world in motion and then abstained from human affairs," it is possible that only one of these men, Ethan Allen, was a deist. With the exception of Allen, all the founders regularly called deists are clearly on record speaking or writing about God's intervention in the affairs of men and nations.³²

George Washington, for instance, referred to "Providence" at least 270 times in his writings.³³ A good example is a 1755 letter to his brother, penned during the French and Indian War:

I have heard since my arrival at this place, a circumstantial account of my death and dying speech. I take this early opportunity of contradicting the first, and of assuring you that I have not, as yet, composed the latter. But by the all-powerful dispensation of Providence, I have been protected beyond all human probability; I had 4 bullets through my coat, and two horses shot under me yet escaped unhurt although death was leveling my companions on every side of me.³⁴

His successor, John Adams, routinely invoked Providence as well, such as when he wrote to his wife that "I must submit all my hopes and fears, to an overruling Providence, in which, unfashionable as the Faith may be, I firmly believe."³⁵ Jefferson did not refer to God's intervention in human affairs as often as his two predecessors, but he did so on occasion. His first inaugural address, for instance, included the line: "may

that Infinite Power which rules the destinies of the universe lead our councils to what is best, and give them a favorable issue for your peace and prosperity."³⁶

Early in his life, Franklin was perhaps more skeptical than any other founder, but by the end of his life, he seemed to believe in Providence. In the Constitutional Convention, he noted that, "in the beginning of the contest with Great Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayer in this room for the divine protection.—Our prayers, Sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered . . . the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that *God governs the affairs of men*"³⁷ (emphasis original). Franklin was the oldest delegate at the Convention, and his proposal to open each day in prayer was seconded by Roger Sherman, an indisputably pious man who was the second oldest member.³⁸ The delegates did not act on the suggestion, but Madison nevertheless discerned God's involvement in the proceedings.³⁹ In *Federalist* No. 37, he wrote: "It is impossible, for the man of pious reflection, not to perceive in it [the Constitutional Convention] a finger of that Almighty Hand, which has been so frequently and signally extended to our relief in the critical stages of the revolution."⁴⁰ (Despite this and another reference to the Deity in *Federalist* No. 37, and three mentions of "Providence" in *Federalist* No. 2, Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore still assert that *The Federalist Papers* "fail to mention God anywhere."⁴¹)

Hamilton's religious views shifted throughout his life, but at least in his early and later years, he gave evidence of believing that God intervenes in the affairs of men and nations. For instance, shortly before his death, he wrote to an unknown recipient, encouraging him or her to "Arraign not the dispensations of Providence—they must be Founded in wisdom and goodness; and when they do not suit us, it must be

because there is some fault in ourselves which deserves chastisement, or because there is a kind intent to correct in us some vice or failing of which, perhaps, we may not be conscious, or because the general plan requires that we should suffer partial ill."⁴²

Even the infidel Thomas Paine wrote in *The American Crisis*:

The vast extension of America makes her of too much value in the scale of Providence, to be cast, like a pearl before swine, at the feet of an European island; and of much less consequence would it be that Britain were sunk in the sea than that America should miscarry. There has been such a chain of extraordinary events in the discovery of this country at first, in the peopling and planting it afterwards, in the rearing and nursing it to its present state, and in the protection of it through the present war, that no man can doubt, but Providence hath some nobler end to accomplish than the gratification of the petty Elector of Hanover, or the ignorant and insignificant King of Britain.⁴³

Of course, some founders wrote or spoke of God intervening in human history more than others, and it is always possible that some did so simply for rhetorical effect. This is almost certainly the case with Paine. Yet, it is noteworthy that most authors who claim the founders were deists ignore these and other clear statements by them that God intervenes in the affairs of men and nations. If deism includes the idea that "God set the world in motion and then abstained from human affairs," then the number of civic leaders in the American founding who were deists may be only one, Ethan Allen; and other than his significant military victory at Fort Ticonderoga, his role in the American founding was minimal.

GOD WORDS?

One of America's most significant founding documents, the Declaration of Independence, affirms the founders' "reliance on the protection of divine Providence." The text refers to God three other times, most critically in the stirring proposition that "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator, with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The Declaration mentions as well "the laws of nature of nature's God" and closes by "appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world."⁴⁴

Some scholars have argued that the use of "distant" or "vague and generic God-language," such as "Nature's God," "Creator," and "Providence," is evidence that the founders were deists.⁴⁵ It may be the case that deists regularly referred to God in this fashion, but, as I've noted, so did indisputably orthodox Christians. For instance, the Westminster Standards, a classic Reformed (Calvinist) confession of faith, refer to the Deity as "the Supreme Judge," "the great Creator of all things," "the first cause," "righteous judge," "God the Creator," and "the supreme Lord and King of all the world," both in the original 1647 version and the 1788 American revision. The Westminster Standards also regularly refer to "God's Providence," and even proclaim that "the light of nature showeth that there is a God."⁴⁶ Similarly, Isaac Watts, the "father of English Hymnody," called the Deity "nature's God" in a poem about Psalm 148:10.⁴⁷ Professor Jeffrey H. Morrison has argued persuasively that the Declaration's references to "'divine Providence' and 'the Supreme Judge of the World' would have been quite acceptable to Reformed Americans in 1776, and conjured up images of the 'distinctly biblical God' when they heard or read the Declaration."⁴⁸ These terms

for God may have been selected to appeal to a variety of Christian audiences, but there is little reason to believe they were used because the founders were deists.

It may be argued that Jefferson, the man who drafted the Declaration, was hardly an orthodox Christian. That is certainly the case, but this is beside the point. As Jefferson himself pointed out in his 1825 letter to Henry Lee, the object of the Declaration was not to “find out new principles, or new arguments . . . it was intended to be an expression of the American mind, and to give that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion. All its authority rests then on the harmonizing sentiments of the day.”⁴⁹ Even though Jefferson may have believed in a vague, distant Deity, when his fellow delegates revised and approved the Declaration, virtually all of them understood that “Nature’s God,” “Creator,” and “Providence” referred to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—that is, a God who is active in the affairs of men and nations.

BUT FOR THE SAKE OF ARGUMENT . . .

Authors who contend that the founders were deists routinely highlight the views of some combination of eight men: Franklin, Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, Allen, and Paine. If we accept a definition of deism that allows for God’s intervention in human events (sometimes called “Providential Deism” or “theistic rationalism”), and ignore the lack of evidence that Washington, Madison, and Hamilton rejected orthodox Christianity, one might make a case that these founders were deists.⁵⁰ Yet, if these men were not representative of other founders, this finding suggests little with respect to the founding generation.

Consider for a moment the background and experiences of these founders. Washington, Jefferson, and Madison were southern Anglican plantation owners. Hamilton was born and raised in the British West Indies and, as an adult, along with Franklin, became a nominal Anglican. Paine was born and raised in England (he lived only twenty of his seventy-two years in America), and came from a Quaker background. In an era when few people traveled internationally, Jefferson and Adams spent significant time in Europe, and Franklin lived *most* of the last thirty-five years of his life in Britain and France. The only member of a Reformed church among these founders is Adams, but like some of his fellow Congregationalists (primarily in and around Boston), he moved rapidly toward Unitarianism.⁵¹

By way of contrast, in his magisterial history of religion in America, Sydney Ahlstrom observed that the Reformed tradition was “the religious heritage of three-fourths of the American people in 1776.”⁵² Similarly, Yale historian Harry Stout stated that, prior to the War of Independence, “the vast majority of colonists were Reformed or Calvinist.”⁵³ These estimates may be high, but multiple studies demonstrate that Calvinist churches dominated New England and were well represented throughout the rest of the nation.⁵⁴ With the exception of John Adams, these Americans are unrepresented by the eight founders regularly discussed by those who contend the founders were deists. In social science lingo, these founders constitute an unrepresentative sample.

Adams was not the only member of a Reformed congregation to embrace something approximating deism in the founding era, but an excellent argument can be made that he is quite unrepresentative of civic leaders from the Reformed tradition. There is little reason to doubt, and much evidence to indicate, that the following Reformed

founders were orthodox Christians: Samuel Adams, Elias Boudinot, Eliphalet Dyer, Oliver Ellsworth, Matthew Griswold, John Hancock, Benjamin Huntington, Samuel Huntington, Thomas McKean, William Paterson, Tapping Reeve, Jesse Root, Roger Sherman, John Treadwell, Jonathan Trumbull, William Williams, James Wilson, John Witherspoon, Oliver Wolcott, and Robert Yates.⁵⁵

One might object that *these* twenty founders do not represent perfectly all of America's civic leaders, which is true. But they are better representatives of the 50–75 percent of Americans who are reasonably classified as Calvinists than the eight founders regularly called deists. If one were to focus on elite Anglicans, one would likely find more evidence of deism in the era, but (1) there were not many elite Anglicans in America, and (2) one would find pious and orthodox men, including John Jay, Patrick Henry, and Henry Laurens, in this group. Because some founders did not leave many letters, diaries, or other documents that shed light on their religious convictions, it is often difficult to discern much more than which church a particular founder attended and/or joined. But students of the founding era should be careful not to read too much into this lack of evidence—and they certainly should not extrapolate from the absence of texts to the conclusion that these founders embraced deism. And it is obviously bad social science *and* bad history to generalize the views of the founders as a whole from the views of a few unrepresentative elites.

For evidence that the examples of “orthodox” founders listed above were, in fact, orthodox Christians, please refer to the “Suggestions for Further Reading” at the end of this chapter. There are good reasons to believe that many of America's founders were orthodox Christians, and there is virtually no evidence to suggest that most (or even many) of them were deists, at least as that term is popularly and historically

understood. Scholars and activists who contend that “most of the American founders embraced some form of Deism, not historically orthodox Christianity,”⁵⁶ should either find additional evidence to support such assertions or show that Franklin, Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, Allen, and Paine represent the religious views of their fellow founders. If they cannot, they should limit their claims to these men. And, if they are careful, they should, in the absence of more compelling evidence, remove Washington, Madison, and Hamilton from their lists of founders who were deists. Moreover, if by “deism” they include the idea that God is a “Creator or First Cause who subsequently stood aside from his creation to allow it to run according to its own rules,”⁵⁷ they must acknowledge that the number of civic leaders in the founding era who were deists may be only one—Ethan Allen.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Dreisbach, Daniel L. *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. Demonstrates that the Bible had a tremendous influence in the founding era.

Dreisbach, Daniel L., Mark D. Hall, and Jeffrey H. Morrison, eds. *The Founders on God and Government*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004. Contains profiles of George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Witherspoon, Benjamin Franklin, James Wilson, George Mason, and the Carrolls of Maryland.

Dreisbach, Daniel L., Mark David Hall, and Jeffrey H. Morrison, eds. *The Forgotten Founders on Religion and Public Life*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009. Includes profiles of Abigail

Adams, Samuel Adams, Oliver Ellsworth, Alexander Hamilton, Patrick Henry, John Jay, Thomas Paine, Edmund Randolph, Benjamin Rush, Roger Sherman, and Mercy Otis Warren.

Dreisbach, Daniel L., and Mark David Hall, eds. *Faith and the Founders of the American Republic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Offers profiles of Gouverneur Morris, John Hancock, Elias Boudinot, John Dickinson, and Isaac Backus. Also includes eight thematic chapters on topics including deism, Judaism, and Islam.

Kidd, Thomas S. *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 2010. A superb account of the important role Christianity played in America's founding.

Richard, Carl J. *The Founders and the Bible*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. Helps demonstrate that many founders were orthodox Christians who had a high view of the Bible.