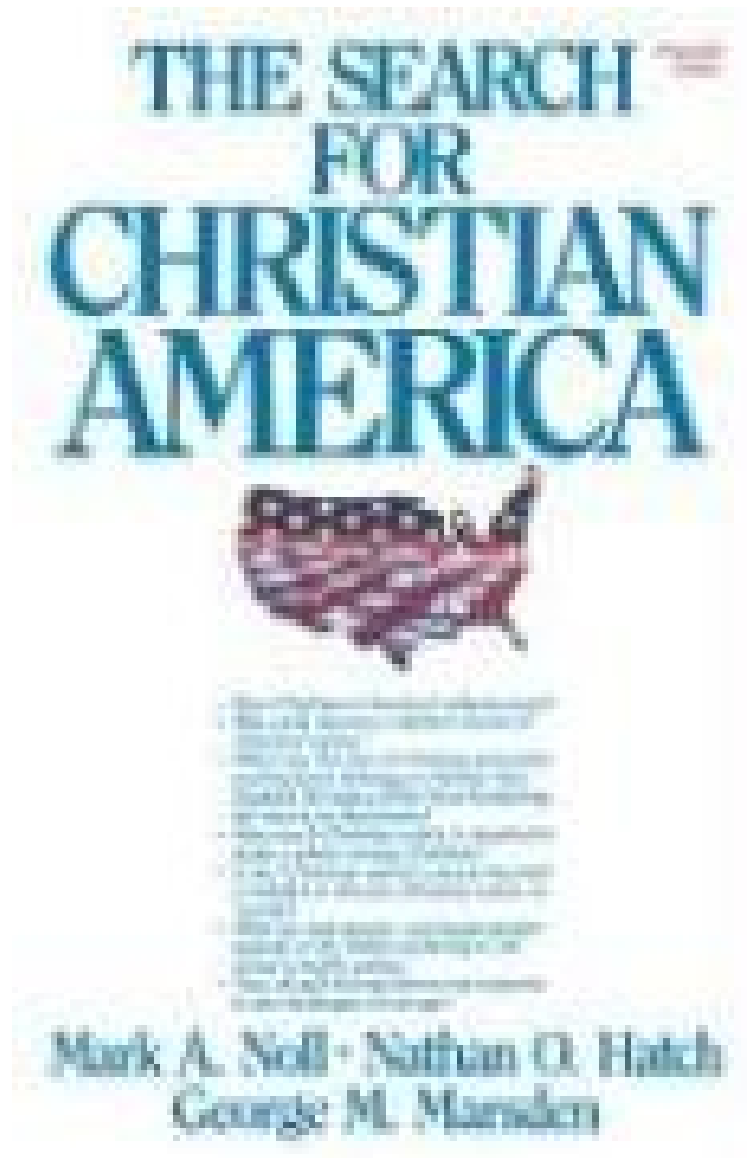


(Pdf free) The Search for Christian America

## The Search for Christian America

*Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, George M. Marsden*  
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**Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, George M. Marsden : The Search for Christian America** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Search for Christian America:

33 of 37 people found the following review helpful. For every American Christian, and every Christian American:By

Jedidiah Carosaari A fascinating look at the truly history of Christianity and the American state. The authors present a very well-researched treatise on how our nation has never been a Christian nation- both because such a nation is impossible, and because we have never been truly a Christian people. But the authors don't present their case too extremely- they strongly promote and welcome the idea of America having been influenced substantially by Christians and Christian thinking. Of particular interest was the chapter on the American Rebellion and Revolution, in which they point out only four of the founding fathers- John Jay, John Witherspoon, Roger Sherman, and Patrick Henry- were what we would consider evangelical today, and even they were not putting Christ first in their theology at all times. The vast majority of the rest were of course Deist. Though these ideas may seem radical to some readers, Noll et.al. presents a great deal of evidence to back up the work, including references to more scholarly work on their part and a very helpful and informative bibliographic essay at the end. The text is designed for the general public, so is not cluttered with difficult theological or political concepts, or copious notes. After reading this, I found I could not consider myself "proud to be an American". Not that America is evil. Noll et.al. show clearly that there is a bit of God and a bit of Satan in American history and culture, as there is in every society. But the clear presentation of how far America has been from the ideals of the gospel, and how often this gets covered up, was astounding. I am proud of the good parts- the God parts. But, if I once could, I can not now look at the history any longer and see it as something specially greater than that of other histories and other nations.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Was America founded as a Christian Nation? By D. T. Klevin I had seen this book in my church's library, but hadn't gotten around to reading it until the recent dustup between David Barton and Gregg Frazer regarding Barton's recent book on Jefferson (that was recalled by the publisher! only to be reissued by Glenn Beck). Frazer's book *The Religious Beliefs of America's Founders: Reason, Revelation, Revolution (American Political Thought)* is a thorough treatment of the religious beliefs of the key founders, and determines that they were neither Christians nor deists, but what he calls theistic rationalists. Where Frazer's book covers a pretty specific and narrow topic, *The Search* offers more of an overview of the time. As has been stated, these three men are first rate Christian historians. There is no cherry-picking of quotes, or relying on dubious sources. They offer first rate research into the history of the time, and present their conclusion, that America was not, in fact, founded as a Christian nation. They cover the founding, and the general religious thinking that prevailed at the time. The Puritan view of America as a "new Israel" is contrasted with Baptists who also settled here. Hypocrisies are exposed and analyzed. The authors show how belief ebbed and flowed throughout the years, a high water mark being the Great Awakening under George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards, but by the time of the Revolution the numbers had dropped off substantially, and Christianity was pretty languid. The preaching, the teaching, and the philosophical sources in Revolution-era America are all examined, and the founders are found to owe more to Locke and "real-Whig" political thought than to Paul or Jesus Christ. In fact, it is shown how Paul was distorted to make him more conformable to Locke, and to add a religious motivation to the rebellion. This is not an "America bashing" book either. In all, they authors strove for a balance between the "did no evil" and the "did no good" extremes. In all, this is an excellent bigger picture view of the question regarding America's founding. I highly recommend it along with Frazer's book.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Faulty Faith of Founding Fathers By Bradley P. Hayton The search goes on for "Christian America." Many seem to find such an America, one that has been built upon Christian principles. Those that find such an America desire that our present America return to its Christian roots and thus again build a firm and Scriptural foundation for our country's political economy. Although the authors do not deny that there has been much Christian influence in America, it is the purpose of their book to dispute the belief of a "Christian America." Their argument is that a careful study of the historical facts reveals that America was neither distinctly nor predominately Christian, if by "Christian" we mean adherence to the Scriptures. In fact, evangelicals themselves are partly to blame for the spread of secularism in American society. The authors also seek to demonstrate that the idea of a "Christian nation" is very ambiguous as well as "harmful to effective Christian action in society" (p. 17). "Treating the naturalistic political ideals of American history as if it were on par with Scriptural revelation . . . leads to idolatry of our nation and an irresistible temptation to national self-righteousness" (p. 23). Also "the failure to establish an independent scriptural position over against the prominent values of the culture . . . can lead to secularization" or confusion (p. 23). A false estimation of American history can compromise a biblical analysis of our contemporary condition as well as make us more cautious in our thinking about "biblical politics." The meat of Noll's, et.al., book lies in its historical analysis of America from the Puritans to the American Revolution. The authors criticize the Puritans on several counts: 1) they fell short of their own aspirations and guidelines; 2) they had a false belief of America as the New Israel and thus falsely thought they could directly apply Old Testament biblical law to contemporary civil law; and 3) they mistreated the American Indians. Rather than saying anything historical about the Puritans, these criticisms mainly reveal the theology of the authors. The authors also state that the concept of "the law above the law" was not unique to the Puritans, but a common belief of the Greeks, Romans, Anglo-Saxons, and Enlightenment. This statement is historically inaccurate. The Greek gods had no law but themselves, the Roman god was the State, the Anglo-Saxon god was the King, and the Enlightenment gods were the people themselves. The English Puritan emphasis on biblical law cause a paradigm shift in political thought: law, i.e. biblical law, was now King, and when the King of England disobeyed, he was to be prosecuted. The authors

also contend that the Great Awakening had almost no effect on the American Revolution, and in fact was a counterforce to the Revolution. Edwards and his followers' millennial expectations and absence of a Christian political theory destroyed any vestiges of the Puritan conception of an organic Christian society. Thus, without a biblical framework in which to think about society, American leaders began to confuse biblical theology and secular nationalism. The faith of the founding fathers is also found wanting. Not only do the authors find the faith of Jefferson, Franklin, and Washington of a non-scriptural sort, but upon further examination find that Madison's and Witherspoon's political philosophy, to their own admission, was based upon British Whig political theory rather than the Scriptures. Noll's, et.al., book is one that will shake some of the arguments of those who advocate a return to the Christian America of the past. It will challenge some of their assumptions. But, for the most part, these historians, contrary to their own contentions, have not written an explicitly historical book about America. At least half of their book is pure theology - their own theology with a touch of a philosophy of history. They believe civil law cannot and should not be based upon biblical law, and then criticize Witherspoon and Madison for using secular philosophy to build their political ideology. They believe that there are rules that the world and Christians can agree upon, and yet criticize the Puritans and the founding fathers for attempting to find these rules, if they do in fact exist. Despite its inconsistencies, this is a book that every Christian student of American history will want to read.

"The Search for Christian America" explores key questions raised by the movement asserting the Christian heritage of the U.S. and calling for its recovery. Through careful historical and contemporary analysis, the authors address such issues as: how much Christian action is required to make a whole society Christian; Puritan New England as case study; Christian principles vs. baptised ideology in the Revolutionary period; the stumbling block of incorrect views of America's history for effective Christian involvement in critical public issues; the relationship of Christian convictions to political or social agendas; learning to think historically as a guard against shortsighted or simplistic approaches. Ample footnotes and a bibliographical essay make this volume a helpful reference tool for further study of the Christian nation debate and related issues. Mark A. Noll is Professor of History at Wheaton College. George M. Marsden is Professor of the History at University of Notre Dame. Nathan O. Hatch is President of Wake Forest University.