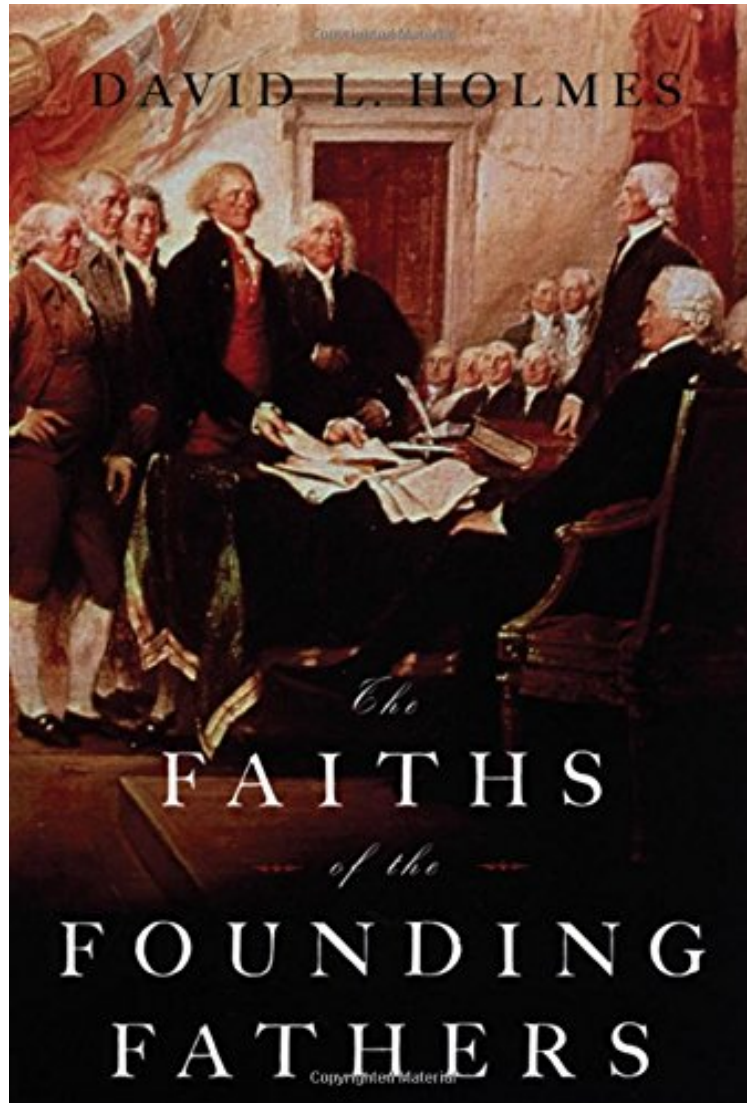


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## The Faiths of the Founding Fathers

*David L. Holmes*

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**David L. Holmes : The Faiths of the Founding Fathers** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Faiths of the Founding Fathers:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A MIXED BAG OF BELIEFSBy richard e whitelockThis book might appeal to many readers. As far for me, I enjoyed reading about the beliefs of many of the founding characters in the birth of our nation. The Founders portrayed in this book were very much influenced by their beliefs. Sam Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry held Christian Orthodox views. Franklin, Washington, John Adams, Madison and Monroe tended not to be "believers" in Christ and some were devoutly agnostic. The last part of the book deals with

the beliefs of our modern day presidents from 1940 through George Bush. We read and hear a lot about the Christian majority in our United States and the influence of such believers went a very long way in the popularity and re-election of Bush. I appreciate that religion was the main instigator in the Puritan Movement, but its leaders sure moved through a great deal of history with blinders on. The manner in which our Native American, women, slaves and the Catholics in Canada were treated, there wasn't much tolerance amongst the denominations. Territories and entire colonies were established upon a specific religious belief and the owners of these beliefs were not very tolerant of others. Believing is one thing, practicing what a loving, giving and God fearing people should believe in and practice is another thing. And as a leader of early Americans, many of our forefathers were less than tolerant of others and rarely practiced what they preached in my opinion. I don't see much proof of tolerance for those who believed differently than our Founding Fathers. Many of them did not rely on the deity for their momentum in establishing a free America based on the principles of freedom of religion. The age of Enlightenment went a long way in arousing America towards a greater religious belief. The fact that we remain so tolerant of others is in my opinion the true bedrock of our greatness as a nation. The fact that we kept religion and the state separate formed a cornerstone of this nation's religious tolerance. This was the greatest religious contribution of our Founding Fathers. Separate and tolerant were most important in our religious survival.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Worth the read / money. By Wes Stecker David is a great historian. He does his research and lets the primary sources speak for themselves. While the book starts by setting the spiritual stage of colonial America at a slower pace, it's helpful to have the background before diving into the founding fathers. Once the fathers are discussed, David's careful homework shines through. He does a great job not only painting an accurate picture of the founding fathers, but also communicating clearly about religious and spiritual doctrine and difference. After a compelling look into the lives of the founding fathers and their family, the book attempts to tackle some of the standouts among modern presidents. While interesting, this portion of the book seemed disjointed to me and ended rather abruptly. All in all, this book is well worth the read and money. Thoughtful historians and curious ministers will find the book even-handed and helpful during a time when so many are interested in the intersection of politics and religion.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Honestly thought it was kind of boring, especially the first chapter. By Customer Honestly thought it was kind of boring, especially the first chapter. Does have some useful info if you're trying to dispel the whole "America was founded as a Christian nation" bit.

It is not uncommon to hear Christians argue that America was founded as a Christian nation. But how true is this claim? In this compact book, David L. Holmes offers a clear, concise and illuminating look at the spiritual beliefs of our founding fathers. He begins with an informative account of the religious culture of the late colonial era, surveying the religious groups in each colony. In particular, he sheds light on the various forms of Deism that flourished in America, highlighting the profound influence this intellectual movement had on the founding generation. Holmes then examines the individual beliefs of a variety of men and women who loom large in our national history. He finds that some, like Martha Washington, Samuel Adams, John Jay, Patrick Henry, and Thomas Jefferson's daughters, held orthodox Christian views. But many of the most influential figures, including Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, John and Abigail Adams, Jefferson, James and Dolley Madison, and James Monroe, were believers of a different stripe. Respectful of Christianity, they admired the ethics of Jesus, and believed that religion could play a beneficial role in society. But they tended to deny the divinity of Christ, and a few seem to have been agnostic about the very existence of God. Although the founding fathers were religious men, Holmes shows that it was a faith quite unlike the Christianity of today's evangelicals. Holmes concludes by examining the role of religion in the lives of the presidents since World War II and by reflecting on the evangelical resurgence that helped fuel the reelection of George W. Bush. An intriguing look at a neglected aspect of our history, the book will appeal to American history buffs as well as to anyone concerned about the role of religion in American culture.

From Publishers Weekly In demystifying what has been argument fodder for over 200 years, religion scholar Holmes (*A Brief History of the Episcopal Church; A Nation Mourns*) sorts through the carefully constructed (and ambiguous or contradictory) versions of the personal beliefs the United States's founding fathers presented to the outside world to present a sound case for what George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin and others did or didn't do on Sundays. Holmes's subjects were acutely sensitive both to the dangers of state-sponsored religion as well as their reputations as leaders and went to what might seem like absurd lengths to cloak their religious leanings (Washington, for instance, rarely mentions church in his journals and, when he did attend, would leave service prior to communion), making Holmes's research and conclusions feats of deduction based on clues gleaned from letters, government documents, second- and third-hand accounts and educated speculation about motivations. Despite its strong points (including a wonderful epilogue on the religious beliefs of presidents from Gerald Ford to George W. Bush), the desiccating tone is one of technical scholarship that may turn off casual readers looking for a narrative history of this hot-button issue. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist Against the Religious Right's insistence that the Founding Fathers were conventional Christians, Holmes pits

facts about religion and religious language in late colonial and early republican America. He doesn't consider all the signers of the Declaration and the Constitution, and he concedes that private convictions are ultimately unknowable. Hence, his evidence is partial and circumstantial. Yet his argument is very persuasive. After a precis of religion in the colonies circa 1770, the Anglican tradition in America, and deism, which was then at the height of its influence, he turns to Franklin and the first five presidents, inspecting their church attendance, observance of sacraments, and the terms they used to refer to the deity and religion. All six seem more deistic than orthodox; that is, they inclined against the Trinity and other supernatural concepts. To point up their practical deism, Holmes invokes the contrasting orthodoxy of the presidents' wives and daughters (Abigail Adams, however, was as deistic as John) and three other founders (Samuel Adams, Elias Boudinot, and John Jay). A modest but definite triumph of temperate historical argumentation. Ray Olson Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "Holmes's book is a model of accessible scholarship, and though it addresses a controversial topic, it actually generates more light than heat. -- Christian Century "This is a valuable little book. It effectively challenges claims coming from both sides of the culture wars by providing a better understanding of both the various Founder's beliefs and the religious environment in which they lived." --Houston Chronicle "Holmes offers exceptionally insightful guidelines for judging the faith of the founding fathers.... Read this elegant book." --New York Times Book "Quite simply, this is the best and most clearly presented statement regarding the religious beliefs of America's founders that I have read." --Richard T. Hughes, author of Myths America Lives By "Concise and smart.... What we come away with is a portrait of a group of men who were products of the Enlightenment and, as such, wanted above all to make faith and reason match up." --Washington Post "A timely book that summarizes the views of the Founders and places them in proper historical context.... While the author believes that the founders' theological beliefs contain valuable lessons for contemporary society, he cautions against going too far when trying to place 18th-century views and practices into a modern context.... A first-rate guide to the past." --Claude Marx, Washington Times "In *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers*, David L. Holmes confronts a great many later myths about the religious views of the revolutionary generation. One of the many excellent features of the book is that it gives neither aid nor comfort to either side in the modern culture wars. Holmes rejects simplistic views that America was created as an explicitly 'Christian Nation,' while at the same time challenging those who imagine the Founders as rigid secularists. Instead of polemic, Holmes gives us an admirably balanced and scholarly portrait of a very diverse spiritual landscape." --Philip Jenkins, author of *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* "The Faiths of the Founding Fathers sticks closely to the sources. When it discusses such matters as the possible return of James Madison to Christian orthodoxy in old age, it clearly labels its supposition as speculation. Its chapter on the religion of James Monroe is especially illuminating. And I agree with the book's overall assessment that the Founders were Deist-like, but not exactly." --Mark A. Noll, author of *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* "This brief, highly readable and responsible work of scholarship will serve as a fine antidote to the pious mythology which often passes for history on this subject." --Peter W. Williams, author of *America's Religions: From Their Origins to the Twenty-First Century* "An illuminating study.... Paints a balanced portrait of the various forms of Deism that existed in the minds of Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, and James Monroe, among others. Surveying the religious beliefs and mainline churches of the groups that settled the American Colonies, Holmes argues that the Founders respected the religious convictions of their time--an idea that conflicts with the prevailing belief that the first five presidents tended to deny the divinity of God and often followed the path of reason." --Library Journal "Historians owe a great debt to David Holmes for laying out the Founders' religious beliefs and practices so clearly and meticulously, and for showing how significant the influence of Deism was in American prior to the upsurge in evangelicalism known as the Second Great Awakening." --H-Net s "[W]ell written, readable, and concise. Its accessible nature makes it an excellent book for undergraduates." --Journal of Faith and the Academy