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In God We Trust

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In God We Trust

Abstract

Almost everywhere I turn I can hear someone saying, “America is a Christian nation!” likely yelled or grumbled with impressive, and sometimes concerning, aggression. I can’t go through a week without this phrase popping up, usually closely accompanied by the notion that America’s founding has roots in Christian principles. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, abortion, America, Barack Obama, Christianity, conversion therapy, exclusion, Gettysburg College, Islam, LGBTQA, Marriage Equality, primary elections, religion, Sexuality, slavery, United Nations, women’s rights

Disciplines

American Politics | Civic and Community Engagement | Politics and Social Change | Religion | Religion Law | Women’s Studies

Comments

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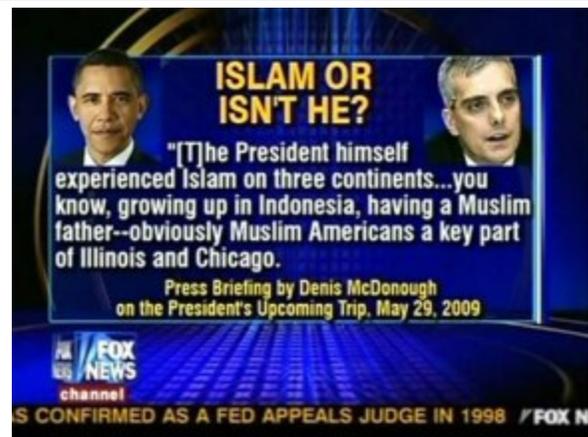
SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

IN GOD WE TRUST

[March 21, 2016](#)

Almost everywhere I turn I can hear someone saying, “America is a Christian nation!” likely yelled or grumbled with impressive, and sometimes concerning, aggression. I can’t go through a week without this phrase popping up, usually closely accompanied by the notion that America’s founding has roots in Christian principles.



I do not care whether or not our founders held Christian principles: that is a discussion for another day, another medium, and a lot more citations. I do not care how many people in America are Christian today or at any other time. I do not care what Christian principles actually are – that question has an infinite number of variations within the Christian community, leaving a single, definitive answer unattainable. I am, however, vastly interested in what lies behind the assertion itself.

The argument that “America is a Christian nation” typically pops up in the context of a religious or socio-political conversation. More recently, it is often heard echoing around the chambers of conservative meeting rooms – or just governmental chamber rooms – when topics like marriage equality or Islam in America get discussed. An examination of this context can help reveal the underlying meanings of and motives behind this supposition.

In both of these situations, the allusion to America’s supposedly Christian founding is customarily used to oppose marriage equality (or as a defense for exclusively allowing heterosexual marriages). Same-sex marriage is, according to this argument, against Christian principles, and as such should not be permitted within our country. In the past, similar ideas have prohibited same-sex couples from adopting children, as was the case of my parents a little over 20 years ago. These ideas have also prohibited sexual minorities from [securing employment](#) and promoted an [overarching social ostracization](#) of the broader non-heterosexual community. This same general argument has also recently been cited as a reason to disallow non-heterosexual individuals from entering the United States. Conversion therapy, a practice that the UN has recently questioned as a [potential form of psychological torture](#) – and which typically carries some form of religious involvement, such as a religious official conducting the “therapy” – has been one of

the most extreme results of some individuals' Christian beliefs. The clear conclusion reached from these examples leaves one with the impression that, in the case of sexuality, a Christianized America – at least envisioned in the minds of these proponents – would exclude, even as a literal banishment, any form of sexual minority from the American populace.

The same trend appears when it comes to the topic of Islam in America. In September, a candidate running for the Republican nomination for President, who at that time placed second among certain national polls, said he “would absolutely not agree with” electing a Muslim president, implying that Islam is “inconsistent with the values and principles of America.” Further evidence of an Islamic president contradicting American values and principles appears in the continual depiction of President Obama as a Muslim; often, if not always, used in order to insult and/or discredit him, a depiction so prevalent that 54% of respondents in a [poll](#) of likely Republican primary voters answered that President Obama is a Muslim. Similar to the topic of non-heterosexual immigrants, but with much more support, is the idea of banning Muslims from entering this country, also often supported with the idea of a Christianized America, although with other supplementary reasons as well. Like conversion therapy, or at least the underlying principle that guides such a practice, some individuals and organizations have suggested that all American Muslims should convert their religion – to Christianity – or [get out of the country](#). As in the case of non-heterosexual individuals, this image of America specifically excludes Muslims from the acceptable mainstream, from a restriction of access to public office to a full restriction of access to the country.

I find it vitally important to reiterate that discussions of marriage equality and Islam are not the only discussions in which the Christian America argument materializes. Instead, those two topics comprise only a portion of the most recent conversations that include a Christian America thesis in a long, long history of conversations that have included such a supposition, including, perhaps most prominently, past debates on slavery and women's suffrage and modern debates on abortion.

To me – and others may surely see it differently – the obvious conclusion reached from these examples is that the argument for a Christian America is used to justify exclusionary principles. A Christian America would not allow same-sex marriage and might even ban homosexuals from entering the country or force present homosexuals to “change” their sexuality; a Christian America would never elect a Muslim president, would not permit Muslims to enter its borders, and would force American Muslims to convert. A clear vision of America begins to form within the implications of this argument: an America where solely Christians– or at least what they believe to be Christians – would be permitted, let alone accepted, into the community. This does not create a country that solely contains intolerance; it constructs a nation strictly established to uphold, among other things, purposefully exclusionary principles.

To believe whether America is or should be governed by exclusionary principles is a decision you will have to make for yourself, hopefully with the help of sufficient, quality evidence in conjunction with an analysis of your conceptions of right and wrong. All I directly ask of you, my readers, is that next time you hear someone claim America is a Christian nation, or maybe do so yourself, think deeply about what that means. Does that solely assert that America's founding involved Christianity? Or, instead, does it advocate for an exclusionary nation built upon a form of Dominion Theology? Perhaps it does both.

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