Book Review: by Vern Crisler


Chapter 1:

I want to say up front that I’m disappointed with Moore’s book. I was expecting to read about various denominations, or various religions, in America, but instead Moore is talking primarily about Protestant religion in general in confrontation with culture. I was hoping for something more specific in regards to religious history.

I did not know (or just forgot) that the Supreme Court had outlawed prayers at football games in 2000 (Santa Fe v Doe). While I find it ludicrous for teams to pray to God so that their teams will win—as if God cared one way or the other—I don’t have any problem with prayers for the health and safety of the participants. I’m also glad that people are defying the Supreme Court on this and they should continue to pray anywhere they like.

Moore says the Constitution posed a problem for Americans who want to keep religion in public life, but I don’t think this is correct. The Constitution doesn’t say anything at all about what Americans can do when it comes to religion. It only says that Congress cannot do something, namely impose or restrict religious observance. (What is it about the word Congress that Moore doesn’t understand?)

Even though I don’t like a lot of our modern public displays of religion, which are often tacky and gimmicky, as far as I can see it, Americans can be as religious as they want to be. They can meet on public property or set up Christmas decorations on public property or sing Christmas carols on public property.

The founding fathers (including Jefferson) actually attended church services at the Capitol building (where Congress met), and they did not think it was a violation of the First Amendment. What can’t happen is for the U.S. House or U.S. Senate to pass a law requiring any of this or prohibiting any of it.

I also object to Moore’s term “godless Constitution.” The word “godless” has overtones of evil and is therefore offensive to theists. It is also factually incorrect as the Constitution in Article VII uses the phrase, “in the Year of our Lord”—although defenders of the “godless” Constitution expend a great deal of useless energy trying to explain the phrase away.

Moore’s explanation of why Americans want to pray at football games is baffling. He says “It takes the guilt away.” I don’t know if I’ve ever really come across a claim quite that disconnected from reality. I wonder if Moore actually asked football fans why they liked to pray before games. I don’t think he did.

In any case, the concept of “guilt” has no explanatory power in this connection. People want to invoke divine protection because (a) they care about the health and safety of the players, and (b) because they like tradition (much the same way they like Christmas). The use of the term “guilt” in connection with modern American football games seems to me to border on the certifiable.

Revivalism is discussed next, but in my opinion Moore doesn’t spend enough time discussing critiques of revivalism.
from within the Protestant community itself. This leaves the impression that revivalism is a major characteristic of Christianity whereas many believe it is simply an aberration. He only spends a paragraph or two, not nearly enough, on Calvinist and Catholic opposition to these movements.

Chapter 2

I believe Moore’s criticism of historian George Bancroft is misplaced. The fact is, America was a Protestant nation from its founding all the way up to mid-twentieth century. Moore practically admits that when he places the end point of Protestant America at the election of Catholic John F. Kennedy in the 1960s.

America has certainly never been a Catholic nation (in the European sense), and in any case during the late 19th century the Catholic hierarchy condemned “Americanism,” i.e., the concept of separation of church and state. Nor was it ever a Jewish nation, for at the time of the Constitution, there weren’t a great number of Jews living in America.

America was a Christian or more specifically a Protestant nation, but it was not a Christian or Protestant government. The founding fathers made sure that foreign governments understood this. The Treaty with Tripoli of 1797 said: “As the government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion,” etc. (my emphasis).

Certainly, America was founded by Christians or Protestants, and Moslems were correct to see it as a Christian nation, but they were incorrect if they thought the American government was hostile to Islam per se. It could not be, because it was not itself based on any religion. It was neutral with respect to religion. (Of course, the government can be hostile to certain behaviors and practices of Islam if those are seen as threatening to the community.)

I liked Moore’s discussion of the Jewish contribution to American culture. Jews have made major contributions to vaudeville and the movie industry (not to mention comedy and sports). However, I’m not exactly sure why Moore felt the need to discuss Jewish contributions in connection with Protestant attempts to censor movie content.

Chapter 3

I did not know what to make of the discussion of popular self-help books. Moore did not provide quotations from any of those books, nor provide footnotes, so there is no way to check the accuracy of his views. If the popular books were didactic in tone, what else would one expect from “self-help” books? These are, after all, all about laying down rules and regulations and whatnot for self-improvement.

In addition, it seems that much of the hostility to entertainment trash was due to the widespread, inter-denominational, “Victorian” moral scruples of the times, not necessarily due to the concerns of a few Protestant clergymen, as Moore contends.

At one point, Moore says that Protestants associated the theater with Catholicism, but he did not provide any references to support this claim. He does mention, however, that 19th century theaters were not what we think of today. They were in fact rough, rude, and vulgar establishments, where alcohol flowed freely, and patrons used violence to show dislike of some performers (throwing rotten
vegetables). Protestants did not need to associate theaters with Catholicism in order to have good reason to oppose them, or wish for them to be cleaned up.

Interestingly, Moore also admits that the Hollywood Production Code “did not harm the quality of American films.” He even points out that the years in which the code was in effect were the “golden age” of moviemaking in America.

The chapter ends with a discussion of Pentecostal and TV host, Pat Robertson, but oddly enough with no discussion of the politically more important Jerry Falwell. Nor is there a discussion of the influence of the Christian Reconstructionist movement, which was the intellectual source of much of the political side of the new Reagan and post-Reagan evangelicals.

In summary, I think Moore is of the opinion that just because Protestant clergy sometimes overreacted to popular culture that their criticisms were in the main unjust. He did not really demonstrate that, but just assumes it.

All in all, we don’t really get much of a discussion of religion in Moore’s book. We don’t hear about the theological debates going on in the Reformed churches, for instance. We don’t hear about the rise of modernism. We don’t hear anything about post-Civil War theologians. We don’t hear anything about denominational statistics, church missions, charity work for the poor, the response of the churches to World War I or II, or much of anything else in that regard.

What do we really get from Moore if not a history of religion? I think that what we are getting from Moore is, in actuality, a history of morality. Much of his discussion appears to equate religion with morality. Hence, he goes on and on about the responses of religious people to the moral rot that began to raise its head in America very early on and has now metastasized into our present cultural cesspool. But again, that is still a discussion of morality, not of religion.

**Chapter 4**

I was not thrilled with this chapter. Moore says in a patronizing way that “women at least as intelligent as [Elizabeth Cady] Stanton clung to their faith.” This sounds as though these women were clinging to their faith as if it were a security blanket. And wasn’t it oh so benevolent of Moore to grant that these women were intelligent, at least as intelligent as Stanton, maybe even as intelligent as Moore, no?

This shows that even liberals like Moore cannot avoid sexism when talking about women of the past. At another point, Moore refers to the concepts of wife and mother as “expected” roles. However, I think nineteenth century women saw these as more than expected roles. Instead, they saw them as natural roles.

Moore again indulges in sexism when he implies that the domestic ideal cherished by most women in the nineteenth century made them “dumb.” Moore allows, however, that they were “not that dumb.” What made them not so dumb? Moore says they weren’t that dumb because these women who promoted the domestic side of womanhood also saw that the “private world of domesticity . . . had public extensions.” Again it’s so very nice of Moore that he grants that some women were not dumb.
On the other hand, Moore goes on to say that “we must not mistake our standards for the standards that nineteenth-century women used to evaluate their lives.” Would that Moore had followed his own advice in talking about women of the past.

He discusses Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and claims that Uncle Tom was “nothing but a woman.” One would think, however, that Uncle Tom was not an emasculated man-slave but rather was Christ-like.

Parenthetically, if anyone could be said to have been emasculated it was the liberal Protestant clergy of the nineteenth century. These clergymen no longer believed in the old, sturdy, Calvinist doctrines and instead they were influenced primarily by women, who made up the majority of their congregations. Because of this, the clergy become more feminine, and the cult of the sickly clergyman became a cliché. Not a few clergymen died young due to carefully cultivated ill-health.¹

Frances Willard is discussed all too briefly. Unfortunately, Moore leaves out any mention of the important Englishwoman Hannah More. These two women had a greater influence on the success of women’s rights than many utopian feminists want to recognize.² The reason is that their feminism was for equal opportunity for women without destroying traditional religion, family, or culture in the process.

Certainly, the influence of these women (or women like Florence Nightingale) was much more impactful than the contributions of flakes such as Ellen G. White, Mary Baker Eddy, or Aimee Semple McPherson.

Moore goes on to lionize Georgia Harkness who became an “elder” in the Methodist denomination in 1926, and was allowed to preach and administer the sacraments to a limited extent.

Of course, a liberal such as Moore uses his version of egalitarian liberalism to critique the past. This includes criticizing Christianity. He does not dissemble and claim that the Bible allows women to preach and administer the sacraments. He admits right up front that such a view is against the teaching of the New Testament.

But Moore’s yardstick is his own liberalism. Unlike the radicals praised by Moore, real Christians would regard women who preach or minister within an ecclesiastical context to be in open rebellion against the teachings of the Bible. Such women would not be regarded as true Christians nor do they preach in true Christian churches.

Chapter 5

I think Moore was much more successful in this chapter about the black experience. He acknowledges that blacks of the north and later the south decided to separate from whites. In the north, it was due to discrimination. Moore is right to point out that black ecclesiastical separatism had negative consequences. In fact I think it was a disaster for blacks. Whites became used to blacks having their own separate churches, their own separate

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restaurants, their own separate houses, their own separate accommodations, symbolized during the 1950s by separate drinking fountains.

If blacks could have toughed it out and stayed in the white congregations, their influence might eventually have penetrated the thick racism of the whites, or would have at least made it more difficult for whites to maintain a Jim Crow outlook with respect to blacks. Black separatism led to a prolonged rift between the races, one that has hardly healed to this day.

Leave it to Moore to promote the words of a Marxist in praise of black ecclesiastical separatism, which was capable of releasing “political energy.”

Moore calls attention to the use of the Exodus theme among blacks, but ironically enough, liberals castigate the Puritans for using the same Exodus theme in the new world. I guess one man’s evil-Puritan-who-killed-all-the-Indians is another man’s freedom fighter.

Various back-to-Africa movements are discussed. Moore implies that there was something sinister about the American Colonization Society—that their primary goal was to preserve America as a white nation. However, this is just plain cynical.

What was the alternative to repatriation? Why of course slavery. Moore, like neo-confederates, seems to think the ACS was merely offering blacks a vacation alternative, not a path to freedom. Far from being sinister, the ACS had prominent founding fathers such as James Madison behind it, not to mention Abraham Lincoln. The ACS must be seen in the context of slavery, but liberals and libertarians tend to forget that when they ascribe cynical motivation as the key factor in repatriation movements.

I see no reason to give any space covering a racist, anti-semitic like Louis Farrakhan.

**Chapter 6**

In this chapter Moore discusses the (disastrous) Immigration Act of 1965, then moves on to what I regard as an offensive moral equivalence comment. This is where he equalized on the same moral playing field Israel’s dropping of a missile on a terrorist enclave (a “neighborhood” says Moore) and a Palestinian terrorist bombing of an Israeli nightclub filled with teenagers.

Liberals like Moore appear to have a peculiar sort of moral blindness that cannot distinguish between national self-defense on the one hand, and deliberate murder of the innocents on the other.

Put me on the side of those who want to stop mass immigration into America. While moderate immigration is good for the country, mass immigration (including illegal immigration) is destructive to the religion, culture, morals, and financial health of a sovereign country.

Catholic immigration is discussed, especially of the Irish. Moore highlights a split between Catholics of a European heritage and Catholics of an Hispanic heritage. He notes that Cesar Chavez, a labor leader, did not run away from his Catholicism.

I should also note here (for purposes of irony) that Chavez opposed illegal immigration. He did so because he believed illegal immigration was undermining the economic power of
American workers. Businesses would fight the unions by hiring illegals, who thus served the purpose of functioning as strikebreakers.

Moore refers to the Cuban community as “notoriously conservative.” Why “notorious”? Given their experience with notorious communists like Fidel, why should anyone be surprised that these largely Catholic immigrants should be conservative in their politics? And why are Protestants called “anti-Catholic” simply for pointing out that Pope Leo’s *Testem Benevolentiae* was anti-American? It is. Why does truth have to be “anti” anything?

The fact is, Leo’s authoritative teaching condemned America’s separation of church and state, and reaffirmed Catholic teaching that the Catholic denomination should be favored by the state to the exclusion of all other denominations or religions. In truth, Catholic teaching favored the sort of expulsion of non-Catholics as was seen at its worst during the reigns of Ferdinand and Isabella.

The immigration of Jews to the United States is discussed. Moore is right that the mass immigration of Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe touched off a wave of anti-semitism. Like most liberals, he does not blame mass immigration for the problem, even though that was the underlying cause. Leading “scientific” racists of the day pointed to the massive changes in the culture of their cities as what inspired their adaption of racist and eugenic ideas that eventually inspired Hitler.

And those massive changes were brought about by the non-stop flood of immigrants into this country. It is doubtful that moderate immigration would have had the same effect. Mass immigration creates ethnic enclaves (slums, ghettos) where immigrants refuse to assimilate to the new culture.

The subject of the relation between Indians and European Americans is discussed. Moore’s discussion is like most liberal treatments of the subject. Indians were innocent children of nature and whites were a brutal, genocidal horde of butchers.

While the history of the relation between the Indians and the Europeans cannot be described as one of humanity’s finer moments, it was not all one-sided. The Indians were just as guilty as the white man for generating the centuries old conflict, and their refusal to distinguish between men, women, and children during war—killing women and children, or taking them as slaves—created a great deal of hatred for them among whites. Nevertheless, despite all of the bad blood and warfare, many Indians became Christians.

I was somewhat offended by Moore’s quotation from Engels, who financed Karl Marx and wrote books promoting communism. Why not quote from real thinkers instead?

And the churches did a good thing in opposing Marxian-style “collective economic interests of workers.” To answer Moore’s question, the workers did not adopt collectivism for the simple reason that they did not want to share their earnings communist style. Rather, they wanted more of a share of the economic pie.

Chinese and Japanese immigration and the attempts to restrict it are discussed. Moore does not deal with the reason for these various attempts to restrict immigration. The reason, of course, is
that these immigrants competed directly against American workers.

In fact, the labor movement in America was in large part a reaction to mass immigration. Businesses could hire cheaper foreign labor and this left many Americans out of work, or required them to work at lower wages. Hence, labor unions (e.g., Chavez, et al.) have long opposed high immigration levels.

Moore ends with a discussion of the success of Chinese and Japanese immigrants in America. I find that to be true. The only other group that can compare are Indians from Asia. And yet some of our laws discriminate against Asians in college admissions, which is ironic given the prejudice Asians had to overcome in the past.

Chapter 7

In this overly long chapter Moore discusses the relation between religious practice and what he calls “science.” He starts out with a discussion of the Scopes Trial that took place in Tennessee in 1925. As usual, he takes the liberal line on what happened. In this case, he turns it into a battle between “conservative church leaders” who wanted to preserve Christian teachings against the threat of “scientific theory.” My understanding is that William Jennings Bryan and supporters did not believe they were attacking what Moore calls “scientific theory” but rather instead were affirming the right of taxpayers to control the content of tax-supported education.

The so-called American Civil Liberties Union was looking for a way to challenge anti-evolution laws, and some of Dayton’s leading businessmen were trying to drum up business for the economically parched and depressed town. Knowing the ACLU’s interest, they hit upon a creation-evolution trial in which they manufactured a charge against willing participant John Scopes.

Scopes was a football coach at one of the schools and sometimes worked as a substitute teacher. The textbook assigned to the biology classes was George Hunter’s Civic Biology. Interestingly, this textbook would not be allowed in public schools today because its chapter on evolution is filled with eugenics, racialism, and Social Darwinist ideas.

There is no evidence that Scopes ever taught evolution in his substitute classes, but it cannot really be said that the participants were primarily interested in truth. Rather, they were interested in publicity.

It’s true that the newspaper editor H. L. Mencken used the trial to attack Dayton, evangelical Christianity, and Bryan. What is ironic about Mencken is that for all his insults directed toward Bryan he actually agreed with Bryan’s position—that taxpayers should be able to control the content of the education for which they were paying.

Moore speaks of Clarence Darrow’s “humiliating cross-examination” of Bryan. However, the trial transcripts do not support any of Moore’s characterizations. Darrow did not attempt to defend Darwin’s theory but got off on an irrelevant discussion of the Bible, then refused to allow himself to be cross-examined the next day.

After discussing the Scopes Trial, Moore goes on to discuss Andrew Dickson White’s History of the Warfare Between Science and Theology, in which White invented a war between religious people and science. At one
point Moore says that what made the Puritans “intolerant” was their conviction that people, “using their powers of reason and logic . . . could discover truth.” I found this somewhat ludicrous. The Puritans were no more or less “intolerant” than any other religious group during their day.

One must remember that for all the nineteen “witches” who were hanged at Salem, and a few Quakers who were executed at various times, most of the other countries of the world were still inquisitorial countries, with “witches” and “heretics” being executed in the thousands.

The intolerance of the age had nothing to do with the idea of using the powers of reason, but it had everything to do with the lack of separation between the ecclesiastical powers and the governmental powers.

According to Moore, the revivalist New Lights who “came very close to setting an irreconcilable conflict between faith and reason.” He also notes that the Great Awakening was not dominated by anti-intellectuals, and he references Jonathan Edwards, one of America’s greatest philosophers (who we might note was an excellent conduit for the teachings of John Locke and Empiricism).

Moore is right that the writers of the Constitution “never sought to base their republic on religious skepticism,” but he is wrong to associate Deism with the American founders. The American founders did not accept a mechanical universe in which God wound it up and let it go on its own. It’s true that a handful of them might have been unitarian in their beliefs, but most, if not all of them, believed that God was providentially involved in the affairs of the Republic, something a true Deist could not countenance.

In his discussion of William Paley and his argument from design, Moore claims that it “eliminated the need for Scripture.” I doubt, however, that Paley ever thought of his argument as eliminating the need for Scripture. He was doing traditional “natural theology” and was engaging with Hume’s critique by presenting the watch as a perfect, entirely convincing example of design.

No matter how much “disorder” existed in the world, all that was needed to prove design was one and only one watch, only one complex machine. That one watch (or eye) offered a proof that could never be overturned by any future considerations.

The next up for discussion are diverse movements such as Unitarianism, the so-called “Higher Criticism” of the Bible, and Strauss’s Life of Jesus. Moore claims these writers of these books “applied to the Bible the same principles of scientific and historical method that they applied to the interpretation of any other book.” I doubt this very much. These approaches often employed speculative (often Hegelian) philosophical theories and tried to make the history of the Bible fit into those theories.

From experience, it is quite tiresome dealing with these types of writers. When a verse of the Bible is cited that contradicts their theory, they dismiss it by claiming the verse is “spurious” or “late” or whatever. There is nothing scientific about “Higher Criticism” for the simple reason that science doesn’t accept what Popper

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3 Cf., William Paley, Natural Theology, Ch. 6.
called “immunizing strategies” such as we find among the “Higher Critics” and the Strausses of the world.

Moore continues with a discussion of Darwin, incorrectly claiming that Darwinism teaches we descended from apes. Rather, according to Darwinism, we descended from ape-like creatures but not from apes per se. In addition, Moore brings up the hackneyed example of “Huxley’s sharp retort” to Bishop Wilberforce (from a very great anti-slavery family). Supposedly, Huxley’s “sharp retort” won the day for science.

The truth is rather different. Huxley’s rendition of Wilberforce’s words is not accurate, and in any case, hardly anyone even heard Huxley’s retort. People were more impressed by the other scientists at the gathering who used (misleading) analogies as proof of the theory, something that continues today.

At one point Moore says that “anti-Darwinism cannot win. If conservative religious thinkers continue to make the test of faith a worldview that stands in conflict with Darwinian evolution, they will lose. They will be stuck with a religion of the flat earth.”

First, “conservative religious thinkers” do not make one’s view of Darwinism a “test of faith.” They consider it a question of authority, not of faith. Secondly, comparing the views of “conservative religious thinkers” to flat earthism is misdirected.

These thinkers would argue that the shape of the earth is an observable phenomenon, whereas Darwinism’s claims have never been demonstrated through observational evidence. They would argue that Darwinism has already lost the debate and that it can only get its way through fallacious argument, including ad hominem arguments, or worse, by harnessing the powers of the state to exclude anti-Darwinism.

Chapter 8

This was a somewhat entertaining chapter, in that Moore describes various quacks and frauds who afflicted the public during modern times, starting with L. Ron Hubbard’s Scientology, with its E-meters, lawsuits, and false advertising. Moore remarks that “movie stars” tend to be the ones who help increase membership in Hubbard’s alleged “church.”

Now in my view, this does not provide much of an argument for the cult, as movie stars are pound for pound some of the stupidest people on the face of the planet.

Moore then discusses medical quackery, mentioning Franz Mesmer and his magnetism, Andrew Jackson Davis and his clairvoyant healing and/or stealing, Sylvester Graham’s dietary delusions, Phineas Quimby and Mary Baker Eddy’s alleged mental healing, the rise of phrenology and the reading of head bumps, and irrationalities connected with Zen Buddhism, as well as Madame Blavatsky’s theosophical follies, which bear a close resemblance to Hegel’s ideas.

There is next a discussion of the issue of fraud, the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act, and the difficulties of enforcing truth in advertising when dealing with religious marketers.

I personally think it is a mistake to compare Norman Vincent Peale to quacks like Hubbard. It is easy to ridicule the notion of the power of positive thinking by holding up the power of negative thinking as an alternative, but there is nothing cultish
in Peale’s approach. A coach who gives positive feedback to a player on his or her athletic performance is not doing anything different from what Peale was doing.

Much of Peale’s approach was to use anecdotal rather than scientific psychology to help people, but much of the criticism directed against Peale appears to be based more on his conservative politics rather than on anything psychologically harmful in his views.

I also don’t think conservatives criticize the “Moonies” because the “Unification Church” is associated with the “cultural radicalism of the 1960s.” No, it is almost entirely because of the perceived brainwashing of young Americans by a two-bit hustler, heretic, and self-proclaimed messiah from Korea.

He ends up with a discussion of various Asian and Indian cranks and antinomians, then with a discussion of American Indian religions.

Unfortunately, Moore shows his Stalinist instincts when he claims that churches need “greater scrutiny.”

Chapter 9

In this chapter, Moore discusses American religious “triumphalism.” I think this reflects the pre-World War I optimism of Americans, some of which seems absurd today, but was very nearly universal in the late 19th century.

A discussion of the response of the churches to the advance of Communist tyranny follows, and also the Sunday mail controversy. Moore shows how the idea of Sunday as a day off started out as part of Sabbatarian arguments, but morphed over the years into a Progressive argument.

Moore once again speaks of the “godless language of the American Constitution” which is still quite misleading as a description of the Constitution. I should note for purposes of irony that the Constitutional Convention did not meet on Sundays.

He claims that if politicians tell voters that they pray to Jesus about what legislation to pass “they are breaking no law.” This is correct. The First Amendment does not restrict what politicians can tell voters, nor does it restrict what voters can do. If voters want to put a man in office because of his religious views, that is their right. If a politician wants to wrap himself in the language of religion, even if insincere, that is his right. The First Amendment only restricts Congressional legislation, not voters or political campaigns.

There is a discussion of the Social Gospel movement, which was really baptized Progressivism. The far left clergyman Reinhold Niebuhr, and the rise of Martin Luther King Jr. are also mentioned.

Moore describes when Protestant “fundamentalists” first became “militant.” It is not clear to me why “fundamentalists” are described as “militant” whereas left-wing groups do not receive such a scary description from Moore.

He is right when he says many religious people took up politics because they saw their traditional way of life being attacked by “secular humanists.” This includes the legalization of abortion, the normalizing of homosexuality, and other assaults on moral standards.

Moore is surely mistaken in describing Reagan as someone who “did not
practice family values.” Why make such a claim about Reagan while at the same time remaining silent about the sexual shenanigans of Bill Clinton?

I think the basic problem with Moore is that he lacks an understanding of the Constitution. For instance, he claims that Americans must catch up to Article 6 of the Constitution which says that no religious test shall be required as a qualification to any office of public trust under the United States.”

This has reference to federal officials, not state officials, who had religious tests for public office many years after the Constitution. In addition, the denial of religious tests for U.S. public office follows the clause where individuals are to give an oath or a (Quaker) affirmation to support the Constitution. These oaths or affirmations were done in God’s name, and the religious test clause is merely meant to block any Test Acts.

These were common in English history (e.g., having to be a member of the church of England in order to hold office). It has nothing to do with the idea that one should “treat religious beliefs as equal.” Indeed, the founding fathers regarded Christianity as superior to any other religion, not equal.

However, they did not want the federal government to have any say in the matter of supporting any particular denomination, or of restricting the freedom of any particular denomination. They said, Congress shall make no law….

Some additional thoughts:

I personally can't stand much of the new evangelical culture that Moore goes on about. It is sort of a me-too Protestantism that tends to ape whatever seems to be culturally popular at the moment. That's why it seems so superficial and trendy to some of us Reformed folk.

On the question as to whether the American founding fathers were deists. I would say, no, no, no. One could describe Franklin and Jefferson as unitarians but not as deists. In their view, God was too much involved in the world, especially in the formation and life of the new Republic, for them to be labeled as deists.

In addition, there is no evidence that Madison was a deist. In a letter to a friend, he characterized deists as "loose in their principles, encouragers of free enquiry even such as destroys the most essential truths, enemies to serious religion." (12/1/1773, Letter to William Bradford.)

With respect to George Washington, he was a long-time member of the Anglican church, and recommended the religion of Jesus Christ to Indians. He joined the vestry (governing body) of the Anglican church and said he would uphold the teachings of the church.

Like some Anglicans, Washington did not stay for every communion, but frequency of communion is not a necessity for being a Christian. Washington often attended church services when he travelled, and he was seen on more than one occasion performing his devotional prayers.

I think Washington was reluctant to discuss theological topics because (a) he wasn't trained in theology, and (b) he felt he had a responsibility as President to appear above denominational or sectarian
partisanship. The language of "deism" was perfect for talking about God without stirring up religious strife, but that doesn't mean those who used that language were in actual fact "deists."

With respect to Thomas Jefferson, as noted, he was not a "deist" and was pretty reluctant to reveal his religious beliefs. He was a member of the Anglican church and attended regularly, but his unitarian conception of Christianity got him into hot water during presidential campaigns. My own opinion is that Jefferson had a mind for politics and philosophy (or science), but had no mind for theology. In that he was much like Franklin.

I believe Moore is mistaken in claiming that Alexander Hamilton was a man "with almost no religion." Hamilton, like Washington, prayed on a regular basis, and while not a regular churchgoer, he expressed his belief in the truth of Christianity and took communion at the end of his life.

I disagree that Americans were proportionately less religious at the founding than they are now. I doubt whether one could find more than a handful of atheists during the early days of America, and even if some were not "true believers" in religion, they were still pretty strict in their moral views compared to our own day.

My reaction to the title of the book *Touchdown Jesus*. It reminded me of how when I was younger an acquaintance used to ridicule certain segments of evangelical Christianity. He would sing: "Drop kick me Jesus though the goal post of life!" His mockery was a bit cruel, yes, but it was a way of making fun of the "muscular Christianity" obsessions of some of our modern evangelicals and their attempt to correlate the gospel with collegiate sports. The movie *Chariots of Fire* took this sort of sports romanticism to way new levels.

Finis