

Virtual Symposium  
**Is this a Christian Nation?**  
Roger Williams University School of Law  
Bristol, Rhode Island

Friday, September 25, 2020

Did the Founders intend the United States of America to be a Christian nation? Does it violate the Establishment Clause of the Constitution to have a Latin cross on a World War One memorial on a public highway or a crèche on the front lawn of a town hall, or to open a meeting of a public body with the Lord's Prayer? How should history be used to resolve such questions? The Roger Williams University School of Law assembles some of the nation's most prominent scholars for a one-day symposium on its main campus in Bristol, Rhode Island.

This program has been approved for 6.5 CLE hours in Rhode Island.

9:45 AM – 10:00 AM WELCOME, Dean Gregory W. Bowman

INTRODUCTION TO SYMPOSIUM, Professor Carl T. Bogus

10:00 AM – 11:15 AM FIRST SESSION

Professor Teresa M. Bejan, Oxford University

“The Politics of Establishment: Roger Williams vs. John Locke”

Professor Bejan will compare the philosophies of Roger Williams and John Locke regarding establishment versus toleration of religion.

John Ragosta, Ph.D., Historian, Robert H. Smith International Center for Jefferson Studies at Monticello

“Is this a Christian Nation? What does that mean?”

Citing history, the Supreme Court often seems to permit not only favoritism to religion but to Christianity specifically, thus appearing to support the view that this is a Christian nation. Dr. Ragosta will explore what it means to say ‘this is a Christian nation’ by examining the history on which the Court relies.

11:15 AM – 11:30 AM MIDMORNING BREAK

11:30 AM – 12:45 PM SECOND SESSION

Professor Marci A. Hamilton, University of Pennsylvania

“Disaggregating ‘Christian Nation’: The Presbyterian Roots of the Constitution and the Rejection of Theocracy”

During the summer when the Constitution was being drafted in Philadelphia, Presbyterian leaders also gathered there to devise their own governing document. There were strong ties between many Framers, including James Madison, and Presbyterian and Calvinist theology. Professor Hamilton will survey the strong influence of Presbyterianism, much of it coming out of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton), on the Framers' principles as reflected in Madison's Notes of the Debates.

Professor Steven K. Green, Willamette University

“The Legal Ramifications of Christian Nationalism”

Claims of Christian nationalism commonly arise in charged political and cultural contexts, and present challenges for a nation that espouses values of religious pluralism and inclusion. Professor Green will examine the legal ramifications of such claims, together with the appropriate uses of historical evidence for addressing contemporary constitutional questions.

12:45 PM – 1:15 PM      DISCUSSION OF MORNING SESSIONS

1:15 PM—1:30 PM      LUNCH BREAK

1:30 – 2:45 PM          THIRD SESSION

Professor Jay D. Wexler, Boston University

“Secular Invocations and the Promise of Pluralism”

Following the Supreme Court’s 2014 decision in *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, atheists and other non-believers have given secular invocations before town boards and state legislatures in record numbers. Professor Wexler argues that this is a development worth celebrating, and that courts which hold that governmental bodies may prohibit secular invocations are misreading the law and undermining true religious pluralism in the public square.

Professor Mary Anne Case, University of Chicago

“Who conquers with this sign? The significance of the secularization of the Bladensburg cross”

Either the devout Christian proponents of the Bladensburg cross are at heart dominionists, hoping to unite church and state in a Christian theocracy, or they should see it as a Pyrrhic victory if the cross is preserved at the price of their denying its religious meaning.

2:45 PM – 3:00 PM      MIDAFTERNOON BREAK

3:00 PM – 3:45 PM      FOURTH SESSION

Dean Erwin Chemerinsky, University of California at Berkeley School of Law

“It never was meant to be a Christian nation and definitely is not one now.”

Dean Chemerinski will argue that separation of church and state was the goal of the framers and definitely should be the interpretation of the Establishment Clause today.

3:45 PM – 4:15 PM      DISCUSSION OF AFTERNOON SESSIONS

4:15 PM—4:30 PM      CONCLUDING REMARKS, Associate Dean Jared Goldstein

This Symposium is supported by a generous grant from the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

Papers from the Participants will be published in the *Roger Williams University Law Review*.