YES—ONCE AND FOR ALL— AMERICA IS A CHRISTIAN NATION

by Don Feder

Rabbi Shmuley Boteach wrote an article in the *Jerusalem Post* (February 10, 2005) charging that some well-known Jewish conservatives are doing incalculable harm to their people by affirming that America is a Christian nation.

In a rather kvetchy column about Jews who defend the public celebration of Christmas and Mel Gibson's "The Passion of Christ," the rabbi rhetorically inquires:

"Is it not highly misguided, not to mention erroneous, for Medved and Lapin to openly speak of America as a 'Christian' nation, something bound to make Jews feel like they are guests in someone else's land?" The author here speaks of syndicated talk-show host Michael Medved and Rabbi Daniel Lapin of Toward Tradition.

Does Boteach also believe we shouldn't speak of America's Judeo-Christian heritage, because to do so will make Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus "feel like they are guests in someone else's land"?

Does "one nation, under God," in the Pledge of Allegiance (and "In God We Trust" on our currency) make atheists and agnostics feel like outsiders? Other than the ACLU, who cares?

Do Israel's Christian and Muslim minorities feel alienated living in a Jewish state?
Individual comfort-levels aside, is it "erroneous" to say that America is a Christian nation? That depends on what you mean.

If it's meant to signify a country whose people are overwhelmingly Christian, the characterization is correct. As

a percentage, America's population is more Christian than India's is Hindu or Israel's is Jewish.

If by "Christian America," we mean that those who shaped our national consciousness subscribed to the tenets of Christianity, that too is true. From the earliest settlements on these shores until the last few decades, our leaders saw America as a reflection of a Christian worldview.

The Mayflower Compact (1620), precursor to the Declaration of Independence and US Constitution, proclaimed that the first permanent English-speaking settlement in the Americas was intended for the "advancement of the Christian faith."

In a message to his troops (1778), George Washington observed: "To the distinguished character of Patriot, it should be our highest Glory to laud the more distinguished character of Christian."

The first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, John Jay, wrote in 1816 that it was in the interests of "our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers."

As late as 1931 (historical revisionism would set in a decade later), the Supreme Court observed in U.S. v. Macintosh, "We are a Christian people."

Woodrow Wilson told a campaign rally in 1911, "America was born a Christian nation. America was born to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of Holy Scripture."

In a 1947 letter, President Harry Truman (who was instrumental in the establishment of the state of Israel) assured Pope Pius XII, "This is a Christian nation."

Even William O. Douglas, that most liberal justice of the liberal Warren Court, was forced to admit that Americans are

"a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being." By a religious people, Douglas did not mean Scientologists.

The foregoing is a very broad overview. Until the secular revolution of the 1960s, none of this was considered remarkable.

America has never had a state church. (Thank God.) At the federal level, there has never been a religious requirement for citizenship or test for public office. (Although the first Congress hired a chaplain and appropriated sums of money to support Christian missionaries to the Indian tribes. It was 1860 before a non-Christian clergyman opened a session of Congress.)

Clearly and manifestly, the American ethos is based on the moral code found in the Torah and New Testament.

Without Sinai there would have been no Philadelphia in 1776 and 1787. Absent Protestantism, there would have been no Pilgrims and Puritans. Without the evangelical Great Awakening of the 18th century, no Lexington and Concord and no "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights."

America was founded on the moral patrimony of the West—that Bible-based code called the Judeo-Christian ethic. Whether they do so out of malice or ignorance, those who attack the idea of a Christian America are really attacking this.

Finally, we must ask if America is a Christian nation—in the sense that our laws still are shaped by Christianity. Alas, no.

A Christian (or Judeo-Christian) America would not have legalized abortion. It would not be inching toward euthanasia. It would not be on the verge of homosexual marriage. It would not have no-fault divorce, rampant promiscuity, state-sponsored illegitimacy, government-condoned pornography or any

of the other myriad delights of a post-Christian culture.

Everything must be something. As Harvard Professor Samuel P. Huntington pointed out in his seminal work, "Clash of Civilizations," all great civilizations are intimately connected to a religion. Culture is derived from cult.

In his most recent work (*Who Are We: The Challenges to America's National Identity*) Huntington writes: "Americans have been extremely religious and overwhelmingly Christian throughout their history."

Huntington further observes that America's national identity is based on Anglo-Protestant culture, including "the English language; Christianity; religious commitment; English concepts of the rule of law, the responsibility of rulers, the rights of the individual; and dissenting Protestant values of individualism, the work ethic, and the belief that humans have the ability and the duty to try to create heaven on earth, a 'city on the hill.'"

Those who believe America can turn its back on our heritage and succeed as a secular civilization are sadly mistaken.

The choice isn't Christian America or nothing, but Christian America or a neo-pagan, hedonistic, rights-without-responsibilities, anti-family, culture-of-death America.

As an American Jew, I never felt like a "guest in someone else's land." America is a product of a process that began when a Mesopotamian named Abram (Abraham) left his land at God's behest.

That launched the Western world on a journey whose footfalls may still be heard. And here we are, almost 4,000 years later. We may worship the Master of the Universe differently, but I identify body and soul with my countrymen who share the lofty vision of Washington and Adams, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt, Calvin Coolidge and Ronald Reagan.

And so, I feel very much at home here.

For more information on the group Jews Against Anti-Christian Defamation, *contact Don Feder at 508-405-1337 or write to P.O. Box 4751, Framingham, MA 01704.*