

## Questions related to David Brewer on the United States as a Christian Nation

1. Speaking for a unanimous Supreme Court, Brewer asserts that “this is a religious people.” What time frame does this “historically true” statement cover?
2. By the end of this Supreme Court opinion, Brewer will make a much bolder assertion by declaring that “this is a Christian nation” (see the underlined words later on). Why do you think he starts out with the more modest assertion that “this is a religious people”? Refer to his first set of examples, which range from Columbus’s commission to the Declaration of Independence, in your response.
3. Moving on to state constitutions, Brewer observes: “Every constitution of every one of the forty-four States contains language which either directly or by clear implication recognizes a profound reverence for religion and an assumption that its influence in all human affairs is essential to the well being of the community.” Brewer is undoubtedly correct in these claims but once again refers to “religion” rather than to “Christianity.” Which two of the state constitutions are specifically Christian, and which four are not?
4. Do Brewer’s quotations from the U.S. Constitution do much to bolster the argument that the United States is a religious or Christian nation? Explain.
5. In the next paragraph Brewer quotes opinions from state courts in Pennsylvania and New York to continue the theme that “this is a religious nation.” Do these quotations bring us any closer to the larger claim that “this is a Christian nation”? Continue your response at the top of the next page.

6. By the end of his Supreme Court opinion, did Brewer convince you that “this is a Christian nation” (as of 1892)? Elaborate on your position.

In a series of lectures given at Haverford College in 1905 (lectures which were also then published as a book), Brewer said:

But in what sense can it be called a Christian nation? Not in the sense that Christianity is the established religion or that the people are in any manner compelled to support it. On the contrary, the Constitution specifically provides that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Neither is it Christian in the sense that all its citizens are either in fact or name Christians. On the contrary, all religions have free scope within our borders. Numbers of our people profess other religions, and many reject all. Nor is it Christian in the sense that a profession of Christianity is a condition of holding office or otherwise engaging in the public service, or essential to recognition either politically or socially. In fact the government as a legal organization is independent of all religions. (*The United States as a Christian Nation*, by David J. Brewer, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, The John C. Winston Company, 1905, page 12.)