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May 17, 2009: Confusion Over America's Spiritual Heritage

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Title: Confusion Over America's Spiritual Heritage

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5/17/2009--The American Center for Law & Justice, which supports religion in American public life, sent out the following message last week: "It's clear that President Obama - through his actions and his words - is a strict church/state separationist. Thankfully, there's a strong move taking place on Capitol Hill to refute this troubling denial by President Obama and preserve America's Judeo-Christian heritage. Give generously to support the ACLJ's nationwide campaign to defend - and protect - America's Judeo-Christian heritage! Congressman Randy Forbes has put forward a phenomenal resolution called 'America's Spiritual Heritage Resolution' (H.R. 397). In essence, the resolution outlines the progression of faith and freedom in our country - from its very inception - and supports the designation of the first week in May as 'America's Spiritual Heritage Week.' Without a doubt, there's reliance upon the Lord in our country, and we must recognize and respect our rich religious heritage. As Rep. Forbes (VA) said, 'If in fact we WERE a Judeo-Christian nation, at what point in time did we CEASE being one?'" This message illustrates an important confusion about church and state among certain religious conservatives. First, yes, America has a spiritual heritage among its people and leaders. Christians built this nation. No reason not to celebrate that. But, no, America was never a Judeo-Christian nation. Because of the Establishment Clause, America was never officially Christian or Judeo-Christian. As to when we ceased to be a Judeo-Christian nation in the first sense that most people in America have been Jews or Christians, we are still that, but now the number is down to 78% Christians and Jews and likely to fall further. The problem with the Resolution is that it seeks to imply that Judaism and Christianity are true. The government cannot do that. What the Resolution could well celebrate is that certain founding principles of this nation, such as universal human rights, are built upon Judeo-Christian foundations. They are and we can celebrate that. We can celebrate that, however, without being Christians or Jews or suggesting that those religions are true.