

Separation of Church And State? - Reality or Myth

Ed Moore

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Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: The author of this article uses the term "Christian" loosely. Someone is not necessarily a "Christian" just because they attend an Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Lutheran, etc. church. A Biblical Christian is one who believes and confesses that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior and also believes that Jesus is the only way, the only truth and the only life and that no one can get to heaven without a faith belief in Him.

It is possible that many of our founding fathers had this saving faith in Jesus as their savior, but the author of this article only makes the point of their church affiliation rather than their profession of faith in Jesus. But without dispute, this country was founded by very wise men who had a deep knowledge and respect for the word of God and the Christian faith.

Many have said that our Constitution did not create a Christian nation, that many or most of our founders were deists, and that our Constitution is based upon "separation of church and state." There are very few areas of information that are more demagogued and misunderstood. I trust we can dialogue about this intelligently. There are several books this information comes from. In part, "Christianity and the Constitution," by John Eidsmoe is most valuable, along with "Original Intent", David Barton; "The Lives of the Signers," M E Bradford; "America's God and Country", William Federer; "Defending the Declaration", Gary Amos; and others.

While it is true that nothing in the Constitution mentions the Christian God, the indication that Christianity was indeed one of the "self evident truths" of the time will become obvious to all who make a serious study of the evidence. Christianity was not mentioned because it was universal in the colonies at the time of the revolution. Less than 1% of the population was anything other than Christian.

Of the 56 signers of the Declaration, 54 were active leaders in their respective churches, various denominations of Christian churches, not synagogues or mosques. In specific, 28 Episcopalians, 8 Presbyterians, 7

Congregationalists, 2 Lutherans, 2 Dutch Reformed, 2 Methodists, and 2 Catholics. Only 2 were self-identified deists. One of those, Benjamin Franklin, hardly fits the mold we've been given describing deists. He was a friend and financial supporter of the famous Methodist evangelist George Whitefield. Whitefield would stay in Franklin's home when in Philadelphia. It was Franklin's call for prayer and God's guidance during the Constitutional convention that broke a 2-week debate that had deadlocked the proceedings and threatened to destroy it. Even a cursory reading of Franklin will show that he was nothing resembling a disimpassioned, irreligious deist.

In this situation of this assembly, groping as it were, in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of Lights to illuminate our understandings? In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for the divine protection. Our prayers were heard – and they were graciously answered...

I have lived, Sir, a long time; and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings that "except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." I firmly believe this; and I also believe that, without concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel...

I therefore beg leave to move that, henceforth, prayers imploring the assistance of heaven and its blessings on our deliberations be held in this assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that service. If that's a deist, we need more of them today.

As you know, the Puritans and Pilgrims left England with the express purpose of establishing a Christian plantation. They left persecution in England to be free to worship Christ unfettered from the dictates of the King. It was their experience in organizing church government that enabled them to run effective civil government. They had over 100 years of experience in these areas before the revolution. It is, in part, for this reason that some have said that the real father of America was John Calvin, one of the founders of the Reformation. In any event, at the time of the revolution America was overwhelmingly Christian.

In "Christianity and the Constitution," Eidsmoe lists research by professors Lutz and Hyneman who closely studied 15,000 works of the founders with explicit political content to establish the authors and works they were

influenced by. "From these items, Lutz and Hyneman identified 3,154 references to other sources. The source most often quoted by the founding fathers was the Bible, which accounted for 34% of all citations. The 5th book of the Bible, Deuteronomy, (Chapter 5 has the 10 Commandments) because of its heavy emphasis on biblical law, was referred to frequently." The other quotations and citations were for people such as Montesquieu, Blackstone and Locke, who were often commenting on various Bible passages or concepts.

Sir William Blackstone had written the most influential books on English law. His "Commentaries on the Laws of England" was the last word in legal argument at the time. More of his "Commentaries" were sold in America than in England, despite the great difference in population. Blackstone's underlying premise was that all law has its source in God. He delineated law into two types, 1. The Law of Nature, which is man's ability to reason right from wrong, instilled in him from God; and, 2. Revealed Law, which is found in the Bible and evidenced in such things as the Ten Commandments. While both were seen as important, Natural Law was subordinate to Revealed Law because of the reliability of the Bible.

"Yet undoubtedly the revealed law is of infinitely more authenticity than that moral system, which is framed by ethical writers, and denominated by the natural law. Because one is the law of nature, expressly declared so to be by God Himself; the other is only what, by the assistance of human reason, we imagine to be that law. If we could be as certain of the latter as we are of the former, both would have an equal authority; but, till then, they can never be put in any competition together.

Upon these two foundations, the law of nature and the law of revelation depend all human laws; that is to say, no human law should be suffered to contradict these."

In all, the influence of the Bible on the Founder's political thought is inescapable. Blackstone's position that "no human law should be suffered" to contradict biblical law is most revealing and perhaps shocking to modern Americans so unaware of our founding history who have been led to believe in the various myths such as being dealt with here. The Founders, however, would be equally shocked that their descendents could have become so cavalier with the serious work they did to establish a nation that would be the beacon of freedom and hallmark of justice for the world.

In large part the Constitution didn't mention Christianity specifically for 2 reasons. 1. As already mentioned, the general universal acceptance and veneration for Christianity at the time made special mention unnecessary; and 2. The Constitution was picking up where the Declaration left off, and the Declaration had already laid a decidedly Christian foundation to our

nation's beginning.

I strongly recommend "Defending the Declaration, How the Bible and Christianity Influenced the Writing of the Declaration" by Gary Amos to understand the Christian philosophical foundation and the various phrases, such as, "self evident truths," "unalienable rights," "endowed by the Creator," "consent of the governed," "Supreme Judge," and "Divine Providence." Far from being nebulous concepts, these phrases had widespread accepted Christian application in political theory.

At the conclusion of the signing of the Declaration Sam Adams (certainly one of the main instigators of the break with England) rose to his feet and said, "**We have this day restored the Sovereign to Whom all men ought to be obedient. He reigns in heaven and from the rising to the setting of the sun, let His kingdom come.**" Adams was an unapologetic Christian and would not have even considered putting his name to a document that did not ensure the preeminence of the Christian religion and a government that would be established upon Christian principles.

In England, the Revolution was called the **Presbyterian Revolt**, because the fires of the patriots' zeal were fanned from Calvinist pulpits. The clergy were called the "**Black Regiment**" in reference to their clerical robes and open support for the war. Often, pastors were militia officers and leaders. The favorite war cry of the colonists as they stormed the British lines was, "**No King, but King Jesus!**", identifying their dislike of the earthly English king and desire to establish new leadership under the King of Kings.

There are so many examples that there simply isn't enough time or space to list them. Thousands of pages of these examples are available once one begins to read history written before 1900. A few more and some exemplary quotes will conclude this initial correspondence.

The History Behind the Phrase

It must be mentioned that the term, "separation of church and state" that is so prominent today is nowhere to be found in any of our founding documents, much less the Constitution. The 1st Amendment says, "**Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.**" Notice that "separation," "church," and "state" are nowhere to be found. Also notice that the entire focus of the article is on restricting Congress and granting free exercise to the people. Today we see government restricting the people and free exercise becoming a thing of the past.

The phrase, "separation of church and state" comes from a letter written by

Thomas Jefferson in 1802. While President, he received a letter from a Baptist congregation in Danbury, Connecticut. They were concerned that Congress was going to name a particular denomination the official religion of the country. President Jefferson wrote back to assure them that could not happen because the 1st Amendment had erected a “wall of separation between church and state.”

For 150 years after the ratifying of the Constitution the federal government honored the Constitutional principle of Congress staying out of religious people and institution’s business, allowing for the free exercise promised in the 1st Amendment. Then, in 1947, in the *Everson vs. Board of Education* case, the Supreme Court used 8 words from Jefferson’s letter, “a wall of separation between church and state,” to say that it had the right to rule on a religious issue in an individual state.

This was unprecedented because the Court used a letter from a President to a group of individuals, rather than organic law, to make its case. And it used Jefferson’s letter in exactly the opposite of Jefferson’s intended meaning when it was written. Never mind the fact that Jefferson, as President, mandated that the Bible and Watt’s Hymnal be used in Washington schools. And, of course we would have to ignore comments like this one, where Jefferson was talking about America’s reliance on religion in government. **“Deemed in other countries incompatible with good government and yet proved by our experience to be its best support.”**

From that one case, *Everson vs. Board of Education*, has come all the rulings striking down prayer, Bible reading and various other expressions and exercises of religion that occurred previously in public schools for over 100 years. *Everson* has created the rallying cry for removing public expression of religion throughout society, in direct contradiction to our Constitution and our history.

"The Myth of Separation" does an excellent job describing the exact derivation of the 1st Amendment and the succeeding Christian influence in our organic documents. "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." David Barton painstakingly shows the various forms "establishment of religion" took before it's final form in the Declaration. Without exception, religion meant Christianity, and establishment meant favoring one denomination of Christianity over another. No other religion was even remotely considered. This was for a variety of reasons. Mainly, there was almost no representation of other religions present in revolutionary America. Secondly, most of the founders, and in particular the drafters of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights believed that the only religion worthy of universal veneration was Christianity.

There is a constitution where “separation of church and state” is guaranteed. It is the former Soviet Union’s in Article 52.

The Founders and Religion

While this may seem especially politically incorrect to modern Americans, the following quotes are most representative.

John Adams, our 2nd President, said, “**We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion...Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.**” He also said, “**Religion and virtue are the only foundations, not only of republicanism and of all free government...**”

James Madison, considered the Father of the Constitution, because he wrote most of it and presided over much of the rest, said this: “**It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage....Before any man can be considered as a member of Civil Society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governor of the Universe.**”

George Washington, in his Farewell address, said, “**Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness, these firmest props to the duty of Men and Citizens.**” He also said, “**It’s impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.**”

John Jay, the 1st Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, appointed by George Washington, said, “**Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.**” The 1st Chief Justice called this a Christian nation and suggested that only Christians should be elected. Wouldn’t the Warren court have a fit over that?

Joseph Story, a Supreme Court justice for 34 years, wrote a highly respected commentary on the Constitution. Two quotes in particular from that work follow: “**The real object of the First Amendment was not to countenance, much less to advance Mohammedanism, or Judaism, or infidelity, by prostrating Christianity, but to exclude all rivalry among Christian sects (denominations) and to prevent any national ecclesiastical patronage of the national government.**”

“We are not to attribute this prohibition of a national religious

establishment to an indifference to religion in general, and especially to Christianity (which none could hold in more reverence than the framers of the Constitution) ... Probably, at the time of the adoption of the Constitution, and of the Amendment to it now under consideration, the general, if not the universal, sentiment in America was, that Christianity ought to receive encouragement from the State...

Any attempt to level all religions, and to make it a matter of state policy to hold all in utter indifference, would have created universal disapprobation, if not universal indignation."

How much clearer can it be than that? Universal disapprobation and universal indignation. It sounds pretty conclusive that the scholarly men who founded this nation fully intended to establish Christianity and Christian principles as pre-eminent.

Then we have the Supreme Court case, **Church of the Holy Trinity** in 1892, where the Court took 10 years to examine the documents and history of the United States and concluded: **"Our laws and our institutions must necessarily be based upon and embody the teachings of the Redeemer of mankind. It is impossible that it should be otherwise; and in this sense and to this extent our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian."**

This is but a fraction of the evidence. I trust the volume is not overbearing, but informative and enlightening. We must know our heritage in order to preserve the government the Founders entrusted to us and pass it on to future generations. There is no substitute for faithful accuracy in this regard. We owe too much to too many who have sacrificed beyond our wildest imaginations to be anything but faithful.

May we dedicate ourselves to accurate transfer of information. We do not have the right to make it up or revise it to fit an agenda. There are far too many doing that already. May the Truth win out.