

Separation of God and Country

A look at the role the Bible has played in the US through the years

“The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.”

- Psalm 9:17

Adopted on December 15, 1791, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution proclaims that Government will not abridge free speech, or prohibit the free exercise of religion. However, a look at the history of our nation, where we came from and where we are heading, paints a very dismal picture for these freedoms. What role has religion played in America, and what role, if any, should it play? Should our government limit some types of speech? Should our government limit some types of thoughts?

History and common sense are enough to show religion as the expression and culmination of the freedom of speech. If an idea can be communicated, the idea will be pondered, decisions will be made, and beliefs will be formed. To attack the freedom of speech is to attack religion and to attack religion is to attack the freedom of speech. However, many people today are convinced that religion is an adversary of freedom. The founders of the United States thought the exact opposite.

Our second President, John Adams, once said, “[statesmen] may plan and speculate for Liberty, but it is Religion and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles upon which Freedom can securely stand.” It is with this principle in mind that the founders lived, and wrote the Constitution.

Benjamin Franklin in a speech at the Constitution Convention in 1787, from which the Constitution was derived, contended that all sessions of the Convention should begin with prayer, “the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this Truth—that God governs in the Affairs of Men... I also believe, without this concurring Aid, we shall succeed in this political Building no better than the Builders of Babel.” George Washington certainly would not have objected to Franklin’s suggestion. One prayer Washington penned to the chief executives of the states requested God to, “dispose us all, to do Justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that Charity, humility and pacific temper of mind, which were the Characteristicks of the

Divine Author [Jesus Christ] of our blessed Religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy Nation."¹

History is often the main battleground for this debate over the freedom of religion. There seem to be three dominant streams of thought in America today. One says religion—namely, Christianity—established our government; another says government has been and should remain separate from religion; and a third says government was established to as a means to control religion. The latter two ideas have gained monumental popularity over the past few decades, while the first idea is quickly becoming a thought of the past—especially in the world of academia. And, if only history could be completely rewritten, the quotes of our Founding Fathers burnt, and the religious quotes engraved on our nation’s historical building destroyed, the first idea might simply be a fairytale by the time our children are grandparents.

It is often the acceptance or rejection of this first concept, the idea that the United States of American was founded on Christian principles, that decides what an individual believes about the freedom of religion—and the freedom of speech.

The early colonists came to America with the hope of escaping the tyrannical rule of the Church of England. In the 1500s, during the reign of Queen Mary, also known as “Bloody Mary”, over two hundred eighty six Christians were burned at the stake.² However, in contrast to popular opinion, this migration was an effort to escape the persecution of Catholicism and in no way an attempt to escape religion altogether. In 1774, after Britain had just attacked Boston, the Founding Fathers made Congress’ first official act—a call to prayer. Opened by Rev. Mr. Duche—who read from the Bible’s book of Psalm and followed with an eloquent prayer—Congress’ official meeting was more of a church service than a political event. Adams, described this incident in a letter to his wife:

I never saw a greater effect upon an audience. It seemed as if heaven had ordained that Psalm to be read on that morning. After this, Mr. Duche, unexpectedly to every body, struck out into an extemporary prayer, which filled the bosom of every man present. I must confess, I never heard a better prayer...³

To this day the Library of Congress is home to a painting depicting this event. The painting is entitled “The First Prayer in Congress”, and its placard reads:

¹ <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel06.html>

² Shatzer, Vaughn. History of American Government and Law. Pg. 16

³ Shatzer, Vaughn. History of American Government and Law. Pg. 10

Washington was kneeling there, and Henry, Randolph, Rutledge, Lee, and Jay, and by their side there stood, bowed in reverence, the Puritan Patriots of New England... They prayed fervently for America, for Congress,... and especially for the town of Boston... “It was enough,” says Mr. Adams, “to melt a heart of stone. I saw the tears gush into the eyes of the old, grave, Pacific Quakers of Philadelphia.”⁴

This early prayer service was, no doubt, a very stark contrast to the 1995 ruling in the *Jane Doe v. Santa Fe Independent School District* case which made mentioning the name “Jesus” at a graduation ceremony a crime. An excerpt from this district court ruling, over which a federal judge presided, reads:

And make no mistake, the Court is going to have a United States marshal in attendance at the graduation. If any student offends this Court, that student will be summarily arrested and will face up to six months incarceration in the Galveston County Jail for contempt of Court... Anyone who violates these orders, no kidding, is going to wish that he or she had died as a child when this Court gets through with it.⁵

Our education system stands as one of the most vivid examples of how Christianity has gone from being the glorious founding father of America to being its unwanted bastard child.

In 1782, Congress ordered ten thousand copies of the Bible to be printed. Congressional notes attached to this contract show that the Bibles were to be used by the public schools—recall that the colonist had just left England where Bibles were chained to pulpits and were only to be read by priests. America’s goal to afford everyone the chance of reading the Bible continued into the 1800s. President James Madison, in 1813, helped pass an act through Congress that called for Dr. Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and founder of the Bible Society of Philadelphia, to mass-produce Bibles.

It is almost laughably ironic how America’s goal two hundred years ago was to get a Bible in everyone’s hand, while its goal today seems to be to remove the Bible from all aspects of life. Noah Webster, another Founding Father, authored America’s first dictionary. Throughout the entire text, Webster utilized Bible verses after definitions to aid in clarification. For example, under the word “Truth” Webster added the following: “...’Thy Word is truth (John 17). ‘Jesus

⁴ Shatzer, Vaughn. *History of American Government and Law*. Pg. 11

⁵ Shatzer, Vaughn. *History of American Government and Law*. Pg. 21

Christ is called the truth' (John 14). 'To do truth is to practice what God commands' (John 3)."⁶ Fast forward two centuries and Jesus Christ and the Bible have not only been excluded from the dictionary, but from the schools, the work place, court rooms, homes, and the list goes on and on.

Webster contended, as is evidenced in the following excerpt from his public school textbook, that the Bible should be the basis for all law:

The moral principles and precepts contained in the Scriptures ought to form the basis of all our civil constitutions and laws... all the miseries and evils which man suffer from vice, crime, ambition, injustice, oppression, slavery, and war, proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible.⁷

Proof that Webster's quote above was more than just an empty ideology came in 1799 when the Supreme Court of Maryland in the *Runkel v. Winemiller* case declared: "...By our form of government the Christian religion is the established religion and all sects and denominations of Christians are placed upon the same equal footing..." Close to one hundred years later this declaration was still upheld—this time by the United States Supreme Court. The 1892 case, *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States*, actually turned into a debate over America's history with the Supreme Court eventually citing eighty-seven precedents to prove that the United States of America was a Christian nation. "Christianity..." it said, "is and always has been a part of the common law... The people of this country profess the general doctrines of Christianity as their rule of faith and practice... We are a Christian people and the morality of the country is deeply engrafted upon Christianity..."⁸

Regardless of these cases and America's Christian heritage, the late 1900s saw a drastic shift away from the Bible and its precepts. In 1962 prayer was removed from public schools—a mandate stemming from the *Engel v. Vitale* Supreme Court case. One year later, the Supreme Court case *Abington v. Schempp* brought an end to the reading of the Bible in public schools as portions of the New Testament were deemed to have the potential to psychologically damage children—marking the end of a two hundred and sixteen year tradition of Bible reading in schools. And, similarly in 1980, the Supreme Court case *Stone v. Graham* resulted in the "Ten Commandments" being deemed too harmful to display in any public school.⁹

⁶ Shatzer, Vaughn. History of American Government and Law. Pg. 12

⁷ Shatzer, Vaughn. History of American Government and Law. Pg. 20

⁸ Shatzer, Vaughn. History of American Government and Law. Pg. 22

⁹ Shatzer, Vaughn. History of American Government and Law. Pg. 27-29

The removal of these three major components of Christianity from our schools came, for the most part, as the result of one phrase, “separation of church and state”.

Thomas Jefferson, our third president, is often heralded, especially by academia, as being an irreligious deist (note: college professors often also claim that Adams was a deist although the quotes used above severely weaken this accusation). This idea is presented as support for the argument that says the founding of America had nothing or little to do with religion—namely, Christian principles. Ironically, Jefferson is also responsible for coining the infamous phrase mentioned above.

To premise Jefferson and what he meant by “separation of church and state”, one should first realize that Jefferson, contrary to popular belief, was a very religious individual.

Jefferson’s average Sunday morning, during his administration from 1801-1809, consisted of a horseback ride to the House of Representatives. There, instead of helping with the masonry work to build a towering and unyielding wall of separation between the church and the state as one might think, Jefferson attended church services. Such services during Jefferson’s administration were also held in the Supreme Court chambers.

Nowhere in our Constitution is the phrase “separation of church and state” found, although it was a part of the U.S.S.R. Constitution.¹⁰ Jefferson, in a letter to the Danbury Baptists, was simply attempting to assure church leaders that the State would stay out of the religious matters when he wrote, “a wall of separation between church and state.” In essence, he meant that the government would stay out of the church’s business. Paradoxically, two days after writing the letter, Jefferson attended a church service in the House of Representatives.¹¹

Today, as will be shown in the following paragraphs, the pendulum has swung so far from history that the church now must advocate the phrase *separation of church and state* in hopes to keep the government from walking through its doors—not to attend the service but rather to end the service.

With the United States’ departure from its Biblically saturated roots has come a shift to European and global ideas of cultural norms and governing processes. A prime example of this phenomenon, and the example to serve as the pinnacle of this essay, is “hate crime” legislation.

¹⁰ Shatzer, Vaughn. History of American Government and Law. Pg. 29

¹¹ <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel06-2.html>

Hate crimes, are defined by the FBI as: “a criminal offense committed against a person, which is motivated, in whole or in part, by the offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity/national origin.”¹² To simplify, a hate crime is a crime committed with an ideology in mind. The idea of hate crimes first appeared in federal legislation in the 1960s. Early laws protected individuals who suffered an attack based on “his race, color, religion or national origin.” Today in America, there is a movement that proposes “sexual orientation” should be added as a protected group under federal hate crime legislation. This idea has already been manifested in a number of countries around the world, and what is more, other countries have moved hate crime legislation to include the idea of “hate propaganda”.

Canada had one of its first hate propaganda cases arise in 2002. It ended with both a newspaper and a conservative Christian being fined for placing an ad in a newspaper that used quotes from the Bible which showed homosexuality to be contrary to what the Bible teaches.¹³ In Sweden, within the past five years, multiple cases have arisen where pastors have been tried for Sweden’s equivalent of hate propaganda, “unfavorable speech”. The majority of these cases have ended with jail time for the ministers.¹⁴

If America continues to follow the lead of European nations, it too will begin to use government to control the church. Over two hundred years ago the colonists’ goal was to get away from Europe and create a nation where the church was protected from the State by a wall of separation. This wall in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries acted as a dam which allowed the church to flow into the state, while the state could not flow into the church. From the 1960s through the 1990s the dam stopped the flow from either direction. Today, the dam has crumbled, the current has reversed, and the state is now flowing freely into the church.

Hate crime laws, by definition, make what you think a crime, and hate propaganda laws make what you say a crime. How is this not an attack against our first amendment rights? Furthermore, to add sexual orientation as a federally protected group goes directly against the grain of what the Bible teaches, and, as can be judged from the rest of the world, will eventually make reading from the Bible a crime in America. “Hate laws” are an attack against free speech and an attacked against the free exercise of religion.

¹² "Hate Crime definition," FBI, at: http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/Cius_98/

¹³ http://www.religioustolerance.org/bibl_hate.htm

¹⁴ http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_hat8.htm

Blackstone's Commentaries on Law, the very first US law book and the text used in establishing the law schools of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, was completely based on the Bible. A page of its text reads, "Providence...enforces its laws by...direct revelation...and they are to be found only in the Holy Scriptures...No human laws should be allowed to contradict these [the Holy Scriptures]...No human laws are of any validity if contrary to this [the Holy Scriptures]." ¹⁵ Our law system was built upon the Bible, yet laws are now being contrived to shut it up.

Adams once wrote in a letter to Jefferson, "Without Religion this World would be Something not fit to be mentioned in polite Company, I mean Hell." ¹⁶ In contrast, today's world holds religion as the something not fit to be mentioned in polite company. The United States has changed—Hell cannot be too far away.

¹⁵ Shatzer, Vaughn. History of American Government and Law. Pg. 19

¹⁶ <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel06.html>