

Words of Baptists, Founders and Others about Church and State

Compiled by the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
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Early Baptists

“An enforced uniformity of religion throughout a nation or civil state, confounds the civil and religious, denies the principles of Christianity and civility, and that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.”

–**Roger Williams**, “The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience,” 1644.

Available online at: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/bdorsey1/41docs/31-wil.html>.

“[W]hen they [the Church] have opened a gap in the hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world, God hath ever broke down the wall itself, removed the candlestick, etc., and made His garden a wilderness as at this day. And that therefore if He will ever please to restore His garden and paradise again, it must of necessity be walled in peculiarly unto Himself from the world, and that all that be saved out of the world are to be transplanted out of the wilderness of the world and added to His church or garden.”

–**Roger Williams**, “Mr. Cotton’s Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered,” 17th century.

From *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams* (New York: Russell & Russell Inc. 1963), Vol. 1, 108.

"God has appointed two kinds of government in the world, which are distinct in their nature, and ought never to be confounded together; one of which is called civil, the other ecclesiastical government."

–**Isaac Backus**, “An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty,” 1773.

Available online at: <http://classicaliberal.tripod.com/misc/appeal.html>.

“The notion of a Christian commonwealth[] should be exploded forever”

–**John Leland**, “The Virginia Chronicle,” 1790.

Available online at: <https://archive.org/stream/writingsoflateel00lela#page/106/mode/2up>.

“Government should protect every man in thinking and speaking freely, and see that one does not abuse another. The liberty I contend for, is more than toleration. The very idea of toleration is despicable; it supposes that some have a pre-eminence above the rest to grant indulgence; whereas all should be equally free, Jews, Turks, Pagans and Christians.”

–**John Leland**, “The Virginia Chronicle,” 1790.

Available online at: <https://archive.org/stream/writingsoflateel00lela#page/118/mode/2up>.

“These establishments metamorphose the church into a creature, and religion into a principle of state, which has a natural tendency to make men conclude that *Bible* religion is nothing but a *trick of state*...”

–**John Leland**, “The Rights of Conscience Inalienable,” 1791.

Available online at: <https://archive.org/stream/writingsoflateel00lela#page/182/mode/2up>.

“Let every man speak freely without fear, maintain the principles that he believes, worship according to this own faith, either one God, three Gods, no God, or twenty Gods; and let government protect him in so doing...”

–**John Leland**, “The Rights of Conscience Inalienable,” 1791.

Available online at: <https://archive.org/stream/writingsoflateel00lela#page/184/mode/2up>.

“Truth disdains the aid of law for its defense—it will stand upon its own merits.”

–**John Leland**, “The Rights of Conscience Inalienable,” 1791.

Available online at: <https://archive.org/stream/writingsoflateel00lela#page/184/mode/2up>.

“Civil government is designed to protect the lives, liberty, and property, of the community, but the divine government is adapted to pardon the guilty, reform the heart, instruct the mind, and improve the morals of the wicked. ... Blood, warlike valor, and state policy, raise men to high rank in the governments on earth, but self-abasement, love to enemies, simplicity and humility, are the characteristics of those whom the King delights to honor.”

–**John Leland**, “The Government of Christ a Christocracy,” 1804.

Available online at: <https://archive.org/stream/writingsoflateel00lela#page/276/mode/2up>.

“Experience, the best teacher, has informed us, that the fondness of magistrates to foster Christianity, has done it more harm than all the persecutions ever did.”

–**John Leland**, “The Government of Christ a Christocracy,” 1804.

Available online at: <https://archive.org/stream/writingsoflateel00lela#page/278/mode/2up>.

The Founders

“Persecution is not an original feature in any religion; but is always the strongly marked feature of all law-religions, or religions established by law. Take away the law-establishment, and every religion re-assumes its original benignity.”

–**Thomas Paine**, “The Rights of Man,” 1791.

Available online at: <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1786-1800/thomas-paine-the-rights-of-man/text.php>.

“... the rights of conscience are, in their nature, of peculiar delicacy, and will little bear the gentlest touch of governmental hand ...”

–**Daniel Carroll**, delegate from Maryland to the First Congress, 1 ANNALS OF CONG. 757-58 (August 15, 1789).

Available online at: http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/amendI_religions53.html.

“The next article provides for ... the prevention of religious tests as qualifications to offices of trust or emolument. ... a provision the world will expect from you, in the establishment of a system founded on republican principles, and in an age so liberal and enlightened as the present.”

–**Charles Pinckney**, delegate to the Constitutional Convention from South Carolina, “Plan for a Federal Constitution,” 1787.

Available online at:

<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=SyVLAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA323>.

“If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension that the Constitution framed in the Convention, where I had the honor to preside, might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical Society, certainly I would never have placed my signature to it; and if I could now conceive that the general Government might ever be so administered as to render the liberty of conscience insecure, I beg you will be persuaded that no one would be more zealous than myself to establish effectual barriers against the horrors of spiritual tyranny, and every species of religious persecution ... [E]very man, conducting himself as a good citizen, and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience.”

–**President George Washington**, Letter to the United Baptist Churches of Virginia, 1789.

Available online at: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-02-02-0309>.

“Article 11. As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion,-as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Musselmen,-and as the said States never have entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mehomitan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.”

–**Treaty of Tripoli**, Ratified by the United States, June 10, 1797.

Available online at: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/bar1796t.asp.

“[W]e should begin by setting conscience free. When all men of all religions...shall enjoy equal liberty, property ... and an equal chance for honors and power ... we may expect that improvements will be made in the human character and the state of society.”

–**John Adams**, Letter to Dr. Price, 1785.

Available online at: <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2106>.

“... to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves is sinful and tyrannical; that even the forcing him to support this or that teacher of his own religious persuasion is depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular pastor whose morals he would make his pattern, and whose powers he feels most persuasive to righteousness ...”

–**Thomas Jefferson**, “An Act for establishing religious Freedom,” 1786.

Available online at:

http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/An_Act_for_establishing_religious_Freedom_1786.

“Be it enacted by General Assembly that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief, but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of Religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.

– **Thomas Jefferson**, “An Act for establishing religious Freedom,” 1786.

Available online at:

http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/An_Act_for_establishing_religious_Freedom_1786.

“I am for freedom of religion, & against all manoeuvres to bring about a legal ascendancy of one sect over another.”

– **Vice President Thomas Jefferson**, Letter to Elbridge Gerry, 1799.

Available online at: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-30-02-0451>.

“Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that *their* legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of separation between Church & State.”

– **President Thomas Jefferson**, Letter to Danbury Baptist Association, 1802.

Available online at: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-36-02-0152-0006>.

“[C]ertainly no power to prescribe any religious exercise, or to assume authority in religious discipline, has been delegated to the general government.”

– **President Thomas Jefferson**, Letter to the Rev. Samuel Miller, 1808.

Available online at: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-7257>.

“The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate. ... It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage and such only as he believes to be acceptable to him. This duty is precedent, both in order of time and in degree of obligation, to the claims of Civil Society. ... We maintain therefore that in matters of Religion, no mans right is abridged by the institution of Civil Society and that Religion is wholly exempt from its cognizance.”

– **James Madison**, “Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments,” 1785.

Available online at: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-08-02-0163>.

“Whilst we assert for ourselves a freedom to embrace, to profess and to observe the Religion which we believe to be of divine origin, we cannot deny an equal freedom to those whose minds have not yet yielded to the evidence which has convinced us.”

– **James Madison**, “Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments,” 1785.

Available online at: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-08-02-0163>.

“... the establishment proposed by the Bill is not requisite for the support of the Christian Religion. To say that it is, is a contradiction to the Christian Religion itself, for every page of it disavows a dependence on the powers of this world: it is a contradiction to fact; for it is known that this Religion both existed and flourished, not only without the support of human laws, but in spite of every opposition from them, and not only during the period of miraculous aid, but long after it had been left to its own evidence and the ordinary care of Providence.”

–**James Madison**, “Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments,” 1785.
Available online at: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-08-02-0163>.

“Whilst the number, the industry, and the morality of the priesthood & the devotion of the people have been manifestly increased by the total separation of the Church from the State.”

–**President James Madison**, Letter to Robert Walsh, 1819.
Available online at: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/04-01-02-0378>.

“I observe with particular pleasure the view you have taken of the immunity of Religion from Civil Jurisdiction, in every case where it does not trespass on private rights or the public peace. This has always been a favorite point with me: and it was not with my approbation, that the deviation from it took place in Congress when they appointed Chaplains to be paid from the national Treasury. It would have been a much better proof to their Constituents of their pious feelings, if the members had contributed for the purpose, a pittance from their own pockets.”

–**President James Madison**, Letter to Edward Livingston, 1822.
Available online at: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/04-02-02-0471>.

“Religion flourishes in greater purity, without than with the aid of government.”

–**President James Madison**, Letter to Edward Livingston, 1822.
Available online at: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/04-02-02-0471>.

“When a Religion is good, I conceive that it will support itself; and when it cannot support itself, and God does not take care to support, so that its Professors are oblig’d to call for the help of the Civil Power, ’tis a Sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one.”

–**Benjamin Franklin**, Letter to Richard Price, 1780.
Available online at: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-33-02-0330>.

“*Civil* liberty *can* be established on no foundation of human reason which will not at the same time demonstrate the *right* to religious freedom.”

–**President John Quincy Adams**, Letter to Richard Anderson, 1823.
Available online at: <http://rs6.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsp&fileName=005/llsp005.db&recNum=902&itemLink=r%3Fammem%2Fhlaw%3A%40field%28DOCID%2B%40lit%28sp0052%29%29%3A%230050007&linkText=1>

Various Presidential Affirmations of Religious Liberty

“And my faith is a very – it's very personal. ... But I'm mindful in a free society that people can worship if they want to or not. You're equally an American if you choose to worship an almighty and if you choose not to. If you're a Christian, Jew or Muslim, you're equally an American. That's the great thing about America, is the right to worship the way you see fit.”

–**President George W. Bush**, October 13, 2004 presidential debate.

Transcript available online at: <http://www.debates.org/index.php?page=october-13-2004-debate-transcript>

“It is essential to this nation’s future that we remember that the freedom to worship who we want, and how we want — or not worship at all — is a core belief of our founding.”

–**President George W. Bush**, Southern Methodist University’s 2015 Spring Commencement Convocation.

Available online at: <https://www.smu.edu/News/2015/commencement-may-bush-address>

“I am grateful that I was born in a country where my faith can be powerful because it is a voluntary offering of a free and joyous spirit. As that great American Baptist, Roger Williams, understood so well, without the freedom to say no, the word ‘yes’ is meaningless. Here in our country more people believe in God, more people go to church or temple, and more people put religion at the center of their lives than in any other advanced society on earth, and that is a tribute to the genius and the courage of the American experiment, that our government can be the protector of the freedom of every faith because it is the exclusive property of none.”

–**Gov. Bill Clinton**, Campaign Address at University of Notre Dame when running for president, 1992.

Available online at: <http://www.c-span.org/video/?32231-1/clinton-campaign-speech>.

“The Constitution, I think, has been interpreted by the Supreme Court in such a way that students should not feel a constraint to pray while they are in a public school. ... I think that prayer should be a private matter between a person and God. ... But in general, I think the Government ought to stay out of the prayer business and let it be between a person and God and not let it be part of a school program under any tangible constraints, either a direct order to a child to pray or an embarrassing situation where the child would feel constrained to pray.”

–**President Jimmy Carter**, press conference, Washington, D.C., 1979.

Available online at: https://books.google.com/books?id=j_5-9zWaBI0C&pg=PA625&lpg=PA625&dq=government+ought+to+stay+out+of+the+prayer+business&source=bl&ots=mjXOoU1iZF&sig=BNzbaiv7Mv8HQX74eA5bDd0qH3o&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwipo4r17arOAhWESyYKHWEfBhMQ6AEIKjAC#v=onepage&q=government%20ought%20to%20stay%20out%20of%20the%20prayer%20business&f=false

“Remember that none of us are more than caretakers of this great country. Remember that the more freedom you give to others, the more you will have for yourself. Remember that without law there can be no liberty. And remember, as well, the rich treasures you brought from whence you came, and let us share your pride in them.”

–**President Gerald Ford**, Remarks during Naturalization Ceremonies at Monticello, Virginia, July 5, 1976.

Available online at: <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/speeches/760649.htm>

“I believe in the American tradition of separation of church and state which is expressed in the First Amendment to the Constitution. By my office — and by personal conviction — I am sworn to uphold that tradition.”

—**President Lyndon B. Johnson**, interview, Baptist Standard, October 1964.

“It is my firm belief that there should be separation of church and state as we understand it in the United States — that is, that both church and state should be free to operate, without interference from each other in their respective areas of jurisdiction. We live in a liberal, democratic society which embraces wide varieties of belief and disbelief. There is no doubt in my mind that the pluralism which has developed under our Constitution, providing as it does a framework within which diverse opinions can exist side by side and by their interaction enrich the whole, is the most ideal system yet devised by man. I cannot conceive of a set of circumstances which would lead me to a different conclusion.”

—**Sen. John F. Kennedy**, Letter to Glenn L. Archer, February 23, 1959.

“I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute, where no Catholic prelate would tell the president (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote; where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference; and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the president who might appoint him or the people who might elect him. I believe in an America ... where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all.”

—**Sen. John F. Kennedy**, Speech to Greater Houston Ministerial Association when running for president, 1960.

Available online at: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16920600>.

“By blood and conviction I stand for religious tolerance both in act and in spirit. The glory of our American ideals is the right of every man to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience.”

—**President Herbert Hoover**, from his 1928 acceptance of Republican Party nomination for president (p. 207 in *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Cabinet and the Presidency 1920-1933*)

Available online at: http://www.ecommcode.com/hoover/ebooks/pdf/FULL/B1V2_Full.pdf.

“We all agree that neither the government nor political parties ought to interfere with religious sects. It is equally true that religious sects ought not to interfere with the government or with political parties. We believe that the cause of good government and the cause of religion both suffer by all such interference.”

—**Gov. Rutherford B. Hayes**, statement running for governor of Ohio, 1875.

Available online at:

http://www.rbhayes.org/hayes/content/files/RBHSpeeches/speech_147_opening_of_the_gubernatorial_campaign.htm.

“I would be tolerant to men of all creeds, but would exact from all faithful allegiance to our republican institutions. And if any sect or denomination, ostensibly organized for religious purposes, should use that organization, or suffer it to be used for political objects, I would meet it by political opposition. In my view, Church and State should be separate, not only in form, but fact—religion and politics should not be mingled.”

–**President Millard Fillmore**, address during 1856 presidential election

Available online at: <https://archive.org/stream/speechesofmillar00fill#page/10/mode/2up>

Other Public Figures

“All religions united with government are more or less inimical to liberty. All, separated from government, are compatible with liberty.”

–**Rep. Henry Clay**, Speaker of the House; address to U.S. House of Representatives, March 24, 1818.

Available online at: <http://www.bartleby.com/268/9/5.html>.

“... it is the natural and fundamental and indefeasible right of every human being to worship God or not, according to the dictates of his conscience, and, as long as he does not infringe upon the rights of others, he is to be held accountable alone to God for all religious beliefs and practices.”

–**Dr. George W. Truett**, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” May 16, 1920.

Available online at: <http://bjconline.org/baptists-and-religious-liberty/>

“Christ’s religion needs no prop of any kind from any worldly source, and to the degree that it is thus supported is a millstone hanged about its neck.”

–**Dr. George W. Truett**, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” May 16, 1920.

Available online at: <http://bjconline.org/baptists-and-religious-liberty/>

“Let us today and forever be highly resolved that the principle of religious liberty shall, please God, be preserved inviolate through all our days and the days of those who come after us. Liberty has both its perils and its obligations. We are to see to it that our attitude toward liberty, both religious and civil, both as Christians and as citizens, is an attitude consistent and constructive and worthy. We are to ‘Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s.’ We are members of the two realms, the civil and the religious, and are faithfully to render unto each all that each should receive at our hands; we are to be alertly watchful day and night, that liberty, both religious and civil, shall be nowhere prostituted and mistreated. Every perversion and misuse of liberty tends by that much to jeopardize both church and state.”

–**Dr. George W. Truett**, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” May 16, 1920.

Available online at: <http://bjconline.org/baptists-and-religious-liberty/>

“The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool.”

–**Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, *Strength to Love* (Harper & Row, 1963).

“I don’t want to see religious bigotry in any form. It would disturb me if there was a wedding between the religious fundamentalists and the political right. The hard right has no interest in religion except to manipulate it.”

–**Rev. Billy Graham**, *Parade* magazine, February 1, 1981.

“I’m so troubled, always, when I see people who are sure that they know exactly what God’s plan for the world is, what political party God belongs to, what God’s ideology is, and what God’s position on particular cases and controversies might be.”

–**Vice President Al Gore**, statement to civil liberty and religious leaders, July 14, 1994.

Judicial Interpretation of First Amendment

“Mr. Jefferson afterwards, in reply to an address to him by a committee of the Danbury Baptist Association, took occasion to say: ‘Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God; that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship; that the legislative powers of the government reach actions only, and not opinions,-I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of separation between church and State.’”

–*Reynolds v. United States*, 98 U.S. 145, 164 (1878).

Available online at: <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/98/145.html>.

“Thus the Amendment embraces two concepts,-freedom to believe and freedom to act. The first is absolute but, in the nature of things, the second cannot be.”

–*Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 310 U.S. 296, 303-04 (1940).

Available online at: <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/310/296.html>.

“The very purpose of a Bill of Rights was to withdraw certain subjects from the vicissitudes of political controversy, to place them beyond the reach of majorities and officials, and to establish them as legal principles to be applied by the courts. One’s right to life, liberty, and property, to free speech, a free press, freedom of worship and assembly, and other fundamental rights may not be submitted to vote; they depend on the outcome of no elections.”

–*West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 638 (1943).

Available online at: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/319/624>.

“Heresy trials are foreign to our Constitution. Men may believe what they cannot prove. They may not be put to the proof of their religious doctrines or beliefs. Religious experiences which are as real as life to some may be incomprehensible to others. Yet the fact that they may be beyond the ken of mortals does not mean that they can be made suspect before the law. ... The miracles of the New Testament, the Divinity of Christ, life after death, the power of prayer are deep in the religious convictions of many. If one could be sent to jail because a jury in a hostile environment found those teachings false,

little indeed would be left of religious freedom. ... [The Fathers of the Constitution] fashioned a charter of government which envisaged the widest possible toleration of conflicting views. Man's relation to his God was made no concern of the state."

–*U.S. v. Ballard*, 322 U.S. 78, 86-87 (1944).

Available online at: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/322/78>.

“The ‘establishment of religion’ clause of the First Amendment means at least this: neither a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another. Neither can force nor influence a person to go to or to remain away from church against his will or force him to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion. No person can be punished for entertaining or professing religious beliefs or disbeliefs, for church attendance or non-attendance. No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion. Neither a state nor the Federal Government can, openly or secretly, participate in the affairs of any religious organizations or groups, and vice versa.”

–*Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1, 15-16 (1947).

Available online at: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/330/1>.