

- Where does America get its religious liberty principles?
- Why shouldn't govt control religion?
- Is America a Christian Nation?
- How does government aide destroy religious liberty?

"The God that Gave us life gave us liberty. And How can the liberties of a nation be thought to be secure when we remove their only firm foundation the conviction in the minds of men that liberty is a gift from God?" -Thomas Jefferson

Liberty does not come from the Constitution, legislation or legislators. If it did then it would be privileges that can be granted, removed curbed or altered.

Liberty precedes government.

Government's purpose is to SECURE liberty – not regulate it, limit it, or control it.

John Witherspoon, delegate to the Continental Congress, President of New Jersey College taught 9 future cabinet officers, 21 senators, 39 congressmen, 3 sup, 12 governors, a Vice President and President:

"If your cause is just, principles are pure and if your conduct is prudent you need not fear the multitude of opposing hosts."

Civil Liberty and Religious Liberty rise and fall together.

Five liberties in the 1st amendment:

- Religion
- Speech
- Press
- Assembly
- Redress

America's Religious Liberty Principles

The principles of religious liberty were gradually learned and understood through the cauldron of history.

The legal charter history of our founding documents was birthed in the context of fighting for freedom of religious expression free from the bonds of Rome or the government of England. The pendulum swung back and forth for centuries, with church persecuting church through the arm of government. This centuries-long history of oppression and bloody persecution continually shape the principles of religious liberty that would form the basis of the new Constitutional Republic of America.

In the legal history of America's founding documents Henry I in the 1100 Charter of Liberties asserts that the Holy Church of God should be free. Planting the seed of the idea that would grow into the concept of **Separation of Church and State**, a barrier keeping the government out of religious affairs – not a barrier to religious expression.

In the Magna Carta of 1215 the Baron's declare to the king that the church is to "be free and have her rights entire and her liberties inviolate."

In 1640s disputes over church autonomy and religious liberty led to the Bishop's War.

James I issues a decree of Religious Indulgence that contained stipulations controlling religious practice. This fuels the religious division and suspicions of the people. This contributes to the Glorious Revolution and brings about the English Bill of Rights of 1689 under which our founders lived.

When America's Governments Controlled Religion

- Early settlers to come to America FLEEING RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION.
- The principle of religious liberty enshrined in our Constitution was NOT the driving perspective in the early settling of America.
- On the contrary, each charter colony established state religions to protect THEIR OWN religious views. Views contrary to the state church were often brutally punished.
- Many were jailed, beaten, hanged, tarred & feathered, disarmed, disenfranchised or expelled into the wilderness.
- Loyalty Oaths were required, whereby the person must swear loyalty to the state religion.

Obadiah Holmes, a Baptist Minister was brutally beaten because he would not confess the state religion of Massachusetts Bay Colony. Mr. Holmes is just one of many such instances. Patrick Henry defended 50 Baptist ministers who were similarly jailed for not taking a state license to preach.

Under Massachusetts law anyone who imported a Quaker the "smuggler" would be beaten and the Quaker hanged. Mary Dyer was one such Quaker.

Contrary to the often white-washed religious history of America, bloody persecution was transported from the Old world to the New World.

The battle for religious liberty that shaped the minds of America's founders raged for nearly 800 years most often a war of Christian killing Christian using the power of government force.

When the government is handed the power to define, control and prohibit thoughts, ideas and philosophies, (rather than punishing specific harmful acts) what will be the limitation of such a power?

"An avidity to punish is always dangerous to liberty. It leads men to stretch, to misinterpret, and to misapply even the best of laws. He that would make his own liberty secure must guard even his enemy from oppression..." -Thomas Paine

Is America a Christian Nation?

The culture that founded America held to a Judeo-Christian world view, and because of this, the view that won ratification was a nation built on religious liberty (freedom of conscience) – not a nation affirming a particular national religion to the exclusion of others.

“It is true, we are not disposed to differ much, at present, about religion; but when we are making a constitution it is to be hoped for ages and millions yet unborn, why not establish the free exercise of religion, as a part of the national compact.”

In the Debate over the Bill of Rights, religious liberty was a particular point of emphasis. John Leland convinced James Madison to fight for religious liberty protection considering the history that people like John Leland’s Baptist forefathers had endured on American shores.

Leland was intimately acquainted with the bloody persecution that had been carried out by the “Christian” colonies in America. In the name of Christianity, the colonies wielded the power of government to brutally quash dissent and cause colonists to conform to the “government approved” doctrines. It was widely held that the only way to protect religion was to leave it in the hands of the individual and prohibit government from having any hand in matters of conscience.

The prevailing founders ultimately agreed with the views of John Leland:

“Every man must give an account of himself to God, and therefore every man ought to be at liberty to serve God in that way that he can best reconcile it to his conscience. If government can answer for individuals at the day of judgment, let men be controlled by it in religious matters; otherwise let men be free. “

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Keeping Government and Its Funds Out of the Church

When Thomas Jefferson was elected president, the Danbury Baptists wanted to encourage their new president to continue to fight to maintain religious liberty. In a letter to President Jefferson they congratulated him on being elected and encouraged him to stand firm on this issue. President [Jefferson responded to this letter in 1802](#) with the following words:

“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.”

Jefferson’s words ‘separation of church and state’ were a declaration that the government has no business in the affairs of the church.

Shortly after the ratification of the Constitution and Bill of Rights, several legislators, Patrick Henry being one, put forth a bill to pay Christian Teachers with tax dollars. The bill was titled, [A Bill Establishing A Provision for Teachers of the Christian Religion](#). The purpose of this bill was to pay Christian teachers’ salaries out of collected tax revenue. Patrick Henry was a great defender of Liberty and an ardent Christian. In this case, his desire to defend the faith blinded him to the dangers of inviting the government into the church in the form of tax subsidies. Fortunately, there were other legislators present that knew the dangers of such an act, and their stand helped to clarify why good intentions can lead to dangerous destinations.

When the government pays a person or an organization to perform a service with tax dollars, that individual or organization places themselves under the oversight of the government, much like an employee. Since, tax dollars are not the property of the government but of the American people, the American people cannot allow the government to spend their money with no accountability. Therefore, regulation of government spending of taxpayer dollars is required. So, to take tax dollars invites government regulation, influence and control into the religious organization. In opposition to Henry’s Bill, an “Association of Ministers and Delegates” wrote this [response](#):

“No man or set of Men are entitled to exclusive or separate Emoluments or Privileges from the Community but in consideration of Public Services. (Quoting the Virginia Declaration of Rights) If, therefore, the State provides a Support for Preachers of the Gospel, and they receive it in Consideration of their Services, they must certainly when they preach, act as Officers of the State and ought to be accountable thereto for their Conduct. . . .”

“...the Consequence of this is, that those whom the state employs in its Service, it has a right to regulate and dictate to; it may judge and determine who shall preach; when and where they shall preach. The mutual obligations between Preachers and Societies they belong to . . . must evidently be weakened — Yea, farewell to the Bill of Rights!”

“to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves, is sinful and tyrannical;” Thomas Jefferson, [The Virginia Act](#) for Establishing Religious Freedom 1786.

The founders believed that a government directing funds to the church undermines the believers dependence on God, and undermines the gospel itself, declaring to the world that God is NOT sufficient to provide for the needs of the church.

“Religion not invented by human policy, must have pre-existed and been supported, before it was established by human policy. [Relying upon government provisions serves] to weaken in those who profess this Religion a pious confidence in its innate excellence and the patronage of its Author; and to foster in those who still reject it, a suspicion that its friends are too conscious of its fallacies to trust it to its own merits.” James Madison, [A Memorial and Remonstrance](#) 1785

“...it is believed to be repugnant to the spirit of the gospel for the legislature thus to proceed in matters of religion; that the holy author of our religion needs no such compulsive measures for the promotion of his cause; that the gospel wants not the feeble arm of man for its support; that it has made and will again through divine power make its way against all opposition; and that should the legislature assume the right of taxing the people for the support of the gospel it will be destructive to religious liberty.” -The Virginia Baptists, remonstrance against paying Christian teachers

“As God is the only worthy object of all religious worship, and nothing can be true religion but a voluntary obedience unto His revealed will, of which each rational soul has an equal right to judge for itself, every person has an inalienable right to act in all religious affairs according to the full persuasion of his own mind, where others are not injured thereby.” – Isaac Backus, Baptist Minister