

Common Sense: The Framers Were Unanimous About Islam

After careful study of historical records, it's clear that America's Founders and Framers were of one mind when it came to Islam, or any non-Christian belief system.

In the late-18th and early-19th centuries, Islam was referred to as "Mohametanism" and Muslims were called a number of different names, but most frequently "Moslems" or "Mohametans." And while different beliefs were tolerated to a degree, they were not given equal station to Christianity, and for good reason.

As Dr. Dave Miller, executive director of Apologetics Press, put it in his dissertation "Were the Founding Fathers 'Tolerant' of Islam?" ([click here for Part II](#)) the Founders believed that Christianity had to be the basis for the new nation. As a result, their view of religious freedom meant only that Christians and non-Christians alike could live their lives free from religious persecution.

Miller said Thomas Jefferson's letter to the Ambassador of Tripoli reflected this worldview when he said "we considered all mankind as our Friends who had done us no wrong, nor had given us any provocation." As it became clear that diplomacy would not end the Barbary Pirates' war against American and European shipping interests, he wrote to then-Secretary of State John Jay:

"The ambassador answered us that [the right to enslave American sailors] was founded on the Laws of the Prophet, that it was written in their Koran, that all nations who should not have answered their authority were sinners, that it was their right and duty to make war upon them wherever they could be found, and to make slaves of all they could take as prisoners,

and that every Mussulman who should be slain in battle was sure to go to Paradise.”

Jefferson drew inspiration from John Locke, who authored “A Letter Concerning Toleration” that delved into the arena of religious liberty.

Toleration, he wrote, had its limits. In fact, there were five cases in which a belief system could not be afforded tolerance by Christians. They were:

- those whose religious opinions are contrary to those moral rules which are necessary to the preservation of civil society,
- religions that teach “expressly and openly” that men are not obligated to keep their promise,
- those who seek to use the cover of tolerance to gain strength in an effort to seize governmental power,
- those who see themselves as having allegiance to another civil authority (specifically referencing Muslims who live in the Christian nation, having come from a nation that had been under Sharia law), and
- those who deny the existence of God.

“To the Founders, permitting non-Christian peoples to live in our country without persecution was not tantamount to ‘celebrating diversity’ or endorsing what they considered to be false religion,” Miller wrote. “Rather, doing so was first and foremost an affirmation of their desire that all peoples be allowed to pursue happiness without governmental intrusion or coercion.”

However, the prevailing wisdom of our forefathers was also that Muslims, pagans, and other non-Christians would not be allowed to become the mainstream of American politics. Nor, would they come to have any office of authority in public

institutions.

But because of their belief in freedom of conscience, which we discussed in previous installments, they refused to codify that with a prohibition in the Constitution of the United States.

In fact, Samuel Johnston—a name you won't hear too often unless you live in North Carolina—who was a member of the Constitution ratifying convention, said non-Christians could only be elected to the presidency or any other high office under one of two cases:

- First, that the American people “lay aside the Christian religion altogether,” or
- Secondly, if any non-Christian could “notwithstanding their religion, acquire the confidence and esteem of the people of America by their good conduct and practice of virtue.”

Of course, those who seek to rewrite American history have gone to great lengths to erase these views from the average citizen's understanding. James Hutson, an official with the Library of Congress, wrote an article titled “The Founding Fathers and Islam” that is now routinely referenced as definitive proof that the Founders explicitly included Islam in their vision of the future of the republic and were willing to incorporate it into the fabric of American life.

This, of course, is utter nonsense, if you actually read what the men said. Instead, we're left with the impression that our atheist Founding Fathers were all in favor of a pluralistic society of “encouragement and acceptance” that equated Christianity with all other religions.

Among the Founding Fathers, it is perhaps easiest to start with the most well known in our quest for the truth of this matter. In George Washington, we have a man of impeccable courage and moral clarity who sought to plant those seeds in

the generations to follow.

Long before he became the first President of the United States, he once wrote to the leaders of the Delaware tribe of American Indians they would “do well to wish to learn our arts and ways of life, and above all, the religion of Jesus Christ.” He told them it would make them “greater and happier,” and Congress would “do everything they can” to assist them in “this wise intention.”

John Quincy Adams, the son of Washington’s vice president, John Adams, later wrote about Islam in his analysis of a war between Russia and the Ottoman Turks. He wrote a scathing rebuke of Islam, the essence of which he said was “violence and lust; to exalt the brutal over the spiritual part of human nature.”

He then presented this brief assessment of the Quran and the chief tenets of Islam:

“The precept of the Koran is, perpetual war against all who deny that Mahomet is the prophet of God. The vanquished may purchase their lives, by the payment of tribute; the victorious may be appeased by a false and delusive promise of peace; and the faithful follower of the prophet may submit to the imperious necessities of defeat: but the command to propagate the Moslem creed by the sword is always obligatory, when it can be made effective. The commands of the prophet may be performed alike, by fraud, or by force.”

George Mason, not James Madison, is responsible for the launching the debate in Congress over the wording of what became the First Amendment. Had his proposal been adopted—well, we wouldn’t even be having this conversation if it had—the “establishment clause” would have sounded like this:

“All men have an equal, natural, and unalienable right to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of

conscience; and that no particular sect or society of Christians ought to be favored or established by law in preference to others.”

This from the guy who wrote the Virginia Declaration of Rights, which influenced both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. Article XVI of the Virginia Declaration of Rights stated:

“The religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence, and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience; and that it is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity towards each other.”

Joseph Story isn't a guy who gets talked about a lot in history books, either, but he played an important foundational role in the fledgling court system following the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. He also authored “Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States,” which led to his being referred to as the Father of American Jurisprudence.

In that book, however, he wrote about the importance of Christianity to the new republic:

“Indeed, in a republic, there would seem to be a peculiar propriety in viewing the Christian religion, as the great basis, on which it must rest for its support and permanence, if it be, what it has ever been deemed by its truest friends to be, the religion of liberty.

“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, so far as was not incompatible with the private rights of conscience, and the freedom of religious worship. An 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."

The real aim of the First Amendment, he concluded, was "not to countenance, much less to advance Mahometanism, or Judaism, or infidelity by prostrating Christianity; but to exclude all rivalry among Christian sects," and to prevent the adoption of a national denomination that would be held above all other Christians (e.g. The Church of England).