

It's Time to Demolish the Myth That's Destroying America

Workers with jack hammers recently showed up at the capital grounds in Oklahoma City and removed the Ten Commandments monument by order of a federal judge who said it violated the First Amendment. In Mississippi, a federal judge, for the same reason, ordered a high school band to remove "How Great Thou Art" from the musical repertoire they played at their school's football games. For the same reason, a kindergartner in Florida, who bowed her head to pray over her lunch, was stopped by a school staffer and told she could not pray in school.

These attacks on religious liberty have become commonplace in modern America and they are all based on a mythical "separation of church and state," a phrase that is not found in the U.S. Constitution. "Separation of church and state" is a contorted interpretation of the First Amendment to the Constitution, which merely says, "Congress shall make no law concerning the establishment of religion, nor hindering the free exercise thereof."

Secularists have taken the first phrase of the First Amendment, known as the "establishment clause," and argued that any expression of faith on state-owned property amounts to an "establishment of religion." Based on this myth, Bible reading and prayer have been banned from public schools and numerous lawsuits are regularly filed against Christians, including a recent suit filed against Benjamin Carson related to his participation in a Bible study with other members of the president's cabinet.

George Washington Was Unacquainted With This Myth

That the secularists have created a myth with their interpretation of the "establishment clause" is obvious when we consider what happened the day after the adoption of the First Amendment. Led by George Washington, the president of the Constitutional Convention, those same Founders issued a proclamation for a Day of Prayer.

Consider also that the ink was hardly dry on the First Amendment when George Washington took the oath of office with his hand on a Bible, bringing his faith to bear upon the execution of the office of president. This was in harmony with his stated belief that, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."

Immediately then, after being sworn in, Washington and members of Congress proceeded to St. Paul's Chapel where they participated in a worship service. So much for a "separation of church and state."

That Washington was unacquainted with this modern myth is also demonstrated by the fact that shortly after being sworn in as president he issued a proclamation designating Nov. 26, 1789, as a Day of Thanksgiving wherein all citizens should offer gratitude to God for His protection, care and many blessings. The proclamation reads in part,

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor, and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me "to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness ... Given under my hand at the City of New York the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789.

So much for a “separation of church and state” in the thinking of George Washington and the founding generation.

The Source of the Myth

The phrase “separation of church and state” is derived, not from the Constitution, but from a letter Thomas Jefferson wrote to a group of Baptists to reassure them that they would not suffer persecution from the new American government such as they had known in the Old World and even in Jefferson’s home state of Virginia.

In this letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, Jefferson assured them that in America a “wall of separation” had been erected by the First Amendment that would protect them from government intrusion. His “wall of separation” was obviously unidirectional, put in place to keep the government out of the church, not to keep God out of the government.

Modern secularists have turned Jefferson’s statement on its head by reinterpreting his wall as a barrier to keep people of faith from influencing government. Jefferson would roll over in his grave at the distortion of his simple statement of reassurance to one of the most persecuted religious groups of that era.

In Jefferson’s mind the First Amendment provided “freedom of the church from the state,” not “freedom of the state from the church.” It is obvious that even Jefferson wanted Christian influence to predominate in the new nation.

Jefferson’s Words and Actions Deny the Myth

Jefferson’s actions clearly demonstrate that he welcomed Christian influence in the public and political arenas and that he saw no problem with the government advancing Christian causes. For example, as president, Jefferson sat on the front row of church services that were held each Sunday in one of the chambers of the House of Representatives in Washington,

D.C.

At one point, displeased with the music, he ordered the Marine Band to provide music for the Sunday services, and the band members were paid with money from the federal treasury. No one protested because no one of that generation had any thought of removing God from the public life of the nation.

Jefferson's high regard for Jesus Christ is shown by the fact that he closed all presidential documents with the appellation, "In the year of our Lord Christ." It is also shown by his statement that, "Of all the systems of morality that have come under my observations, none appear to me so pure as that of Jesus."

As founder of the University of Virginia, Jefferson invited the churches of all sects and denominations to establish schools of instruction adjacent to or within the precincts of the university. He wrote:

The students of the University will be free and expected to attend religious worship at the establishment of their respective sects, in the morning, and in time to meet their school at the University at its stated hour (Hyatt, Pilgrims and Patriots, 151).

The Reason for the First Amendment

It is obvious that the modern myth of a "separation of church and state" did not originate with Jefferson. Neither did this myth originate with anyone in the founding generation. This was confirmed by Joseph Story (1779-1845) who served as a Supreme Court justice for 34 years from 1811-1845. Commenting on the First Amendment, Story said:

We are not to attribute this prohibition of a national religious establishment to an indifference in religion, and especially to Christianity, which none could

hold in more reverence than the framers of the Constitution (Hyatt, Pilgrims and Patriots, 152-53).

The First Amendment was put in place to guarantee that America would never have an official, state-sanctioned church, which had been the norm in Europe since the time of Constantine. These state-authorized churches, with the power of the government at their disposal, persecuted, imprisoned and put to death those who dared to deviate from the “official” policies of the “official” state church.

Most of the founders, or their parents or grandparents, had suffered at the hands of those state churches, both Catholic and Protestant. Benjamin Franklin, for example, tells how his grandfather, during the reign of Mary Tudor, had to read the Bible to his family in secret in order to keep from being arrested.

He did this by fastening an open Bible on the bottom and underneath the cover of a stool. With one of the children watching at the door for civil or religious authorities, he would turn the stool upside down and read the Bible to his family. In case of danger, he would quickly secure the pages and return the stool upright to its place in the corner of the room.

The danger was real for during Mary’s reign many Protestants were imprisoned and 288 were burned at the stake for their faith. The Founders were determined that such would never be the case in America.

The First Amendment was put in place to guarantee religious liberty. It guaranteed that the government would never create a national, state church and would protect the liberty of all good people of faith to live and worship according to the dictates of their conscience.

The Founders considered the First Amendment to be based on

Christian values of individual freedom and religious liberty, and this was affirmed over and over in their words and actions.

The Founding Generation Would be Horrified at This Modern Myth

The Christian mindset of the Founders was affirmed in a 10-year project to discover where they got their ideas for America's founding documents, including the First Amendment. The study found that by far the single most-cited authority in their writings was the Bible (Hyatt, *Pilgrims and Patriots*, 163). It comes then as no surprise that John Adams, nearly four decades after the American Revolution, would declare:

The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence were ... the general principles of Christianity. Now I will avow that I then believed, and now believe, that those general principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God (Hyatt, Pilgrims and Patriots, 163-64).

John Marshall (1755-1835), who served as the second Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court for 34 years, would be mystified by the modern idea of the "separation of church and state." In one of his writings, Marshall clearly states what every Founder assumed; that the founding documents and institutions on which the nation was formed presuppose a commitment to Christian principles and values. He wrote:

No person, I believe, questions the importance of religion in the happiness of man, even during his existence in this world. The American population is entirely Christian, and with us Christianity and religion are identified. It would be strange, indeed, if with such a people, our institutions did not presuppose Christianity, and did not refer to it, and exhibit relations with it (Hyatt, Pilgrims and Patriots, 166).

While Chief Justice, Marshall made the Supreme Court facilities available to a local congregation for their Sunday gatherings. So, each Sunday, the singing of Christian hymns and the preaching of God's Word could be heard ringing through the chambers of both the House of Representatives and the Supreme Court. This was neither surprising nor offensive to anyone, for it fit perfectly within the mindset of the founding generation.

A French Visitor Sees No Sign of the Myth

That America's founders did not separate God from government was obvious to the young French sociologist, Alexis de Tocqueville, who came to America in 1831 to study her institutions. He wanted to see if he could discover the reason for America's rapid rise to power and affluence in the world.

Arriving on the heels of the Second Great Awakening, he exclaimed, "The religious atmosphere of the country was the first thing that struck me on arrival in the United States." Tocqueville said that Americans had combined the notions of Christianity and civil liberty so intimately in their minds that it was impossible to make them conceive of one without the other. He concluded that, in America, "From the beginning, politics and religion contracted an alliance which has never been dissolved" (Hyatt, *Pilgrims and Patriots*, 168).

According to Tocqueville, this linking of faith with civil liberty was the reason for their passion to spread the gospel to the American frontier where new settlements were springing up. He wrote:

I have known of societies formed by the Americans to send out ministers of the Gospel in the new Western states, to found schools and churches there, lest religion should be suffered to die away in those remote settlements, and the rising states be less fitted to enjoy free institutions than the people from whom they came. I met with New Englanders who

abandoned the country in which they were born in order to lay the foundations of Christianity and of freedom on the banks of the Missouri, or in the prairies of Illinois. Thus, religious zeal is warmed in the United States by the fires of patriotism.

Tocqueville told how, while he was in America, a witness was called to testify before the court in Chester County in the state of New York. When, however, the witness admitted he did not believe in the existence of God, the judge refused to admit his testimony as evidence. According to the judge, by admitting he did not believe in the existence of God, the witness had “destroyed all the confidence of the court in what he was about to say.” Tocqueville said the incident was merely noted in the newspaper without further comment.

Tocqueville saw no “separation of church and state” in America in 1831. He in fact saw faith and freedom running parallel and producing the most prosperous and free nation the world had ever seen. To those critics in Europe who did not believe that freedom and faith could coincide in a nation, Tocqueville responded, “I can only reply that those who hold this language have never been to America.”

A Supreme Court Declaration

The merger of faith and freedom was still a part of the American mindset as recent as 1892, when in the ruling of *Church of the Holy Trinity vs The United States*, the United States Supreme Court declared:

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 ... From the discovery of this continent to the present hour, there is a single voice making this affirmation ... we find everywhere a clear

recognition of the same truth that this is a Christian nation (Hyatt, Pilgrims and Patriots, 167).

This clear statement was made by the nation's highest Court after investigating thousands of historical documents. They saw no sign of the modern myth of a "separation of church and state" as is propagated by so many in our nation today.

The Way Forward

Jesus said in John 8:32, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." We must take the truth and go on the offensive. We must teach everyone—friends, children, co-workers, etc.—the truth about America's founding and about the myth that has been foisted upon us.

As truth is proclaimed and received, students, teachers, pastors, politicians and all freedom-loving people will be liberated to stand strong in their faith, for they will realize that their faith is the source of their civil liberty. This was the understanding of the Founders and was expressed by John Adams in a letter to his cousin, Zabdiel, two weeks before the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. He wrote:

Statesmen, my dear sir, may plan and speculate for Liberty, but it is Religion [Christianity] and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles, upon which freedom can securely stand (Hyatt, Pilgrims and Patriots, 173).

God is calling American Christians to take back this nation's heritage of faith and freedom that has been stolen in the past 60 years. This is a vital key to seeing another great, national spiritual awakening sweep across the land and a national healing as promised in 2 Chronicles 7:14.

*This article is derived from **Dr. Eddie Hyatt's** book, Pilgrims and Patriots, available from Amazon and his website at . Dr.*

Hyatt also conducts "America Reawakening" events, which consists of a PowerPoint presentation documenting how America was birthed out of prayer and spiritual awakening, and a call for Christians to rise up and believe God for another Great Awakening across the land. Information is available from his website.