

Let's Confront 'Separation of Church and State' Myth

On Wednesday June 19, Governor Jeff Landry of Louisiana signed a bill into law requiring the Ten Commandments to be displayed in all of the state's public schools. Secular organizations such as the ACLU immediately threatened lawsuits because, according to them, this bill violates the "separation of church and state."

However, no one can find the phrase "separation of church and state" in America's founding documents. None of the Founding Fathers used it. Instead, it is a myth created by anti-Christian activists who want to purge the nation of its Christian heritage.

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A Distortion of Jefferson's Words

The phrase is a distortion of Jefferson's words in a letter to the Danbury Baptist Association of Connecticut from Jan. 1, 1802. In it, Jefferson addressed the Baptists' concerns about how they would be treated in the new nation.

They had reason for concern because throughout Europe, the Baptists had been outlawed and severely persecuted by the state and the state-sanctioned churches, both Catholic and Protestant. They were imprisoned and put to death because of their refusal to conform to the official church doctrines and practices imposed by the state.

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In his response, Jefferson quoted the part of the First

Amendment that reads, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." He assured the Baptists that this meant that in the new nation, a "wall of separation" had been erected that would protect them from the state's intrusion.

Jefferson's "wall of separation" was obviously unidirectional, put in place to keep the government out of the church, not the reverse. His own actions affirm this, for as president, he took money from the federal treasury to pay for a missionary to the Kaskaskia Indian tribe and to build a church building for them in which to worship (Hyatt, "1726: The Year that Defined America," 149).

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