

RELIGION IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC



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RELIGION AND THE FOUNDERS

GENERAL OVERVIEW

Religion has always been important in America. During the colonial and Revolutionary eras, religion permeated the lives of Americans. Blue laws kept the Sabbath holy and consumption laws limited the actions of everyone. Christianity was one of the few links that bound American society together from Maine to Georgia. The Bible, in addition to being the divine word of God that would guide people through life's journey to the next world, served as a textbook for history, a source book for morals, a primer for mothers to teach their children how to read, and a window through which to view and understand human nature. With the high death rate, especially among infants, child-bearing women, and seafarers, Americans stoically resigned themselves to the will of God. Because religion and morality were seen as necessary components of stable society, colonial and Revolutionary governments supported religion. Clergymen were among the most influential members of the community and many of them actively participated in government.

The liberal religious traditions embodied in the charters and fundamental laws of Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, and the Carolinas read very much like the declarations of indulgences promulgated by Charles II and James II that were so bitterly denounced by the Anglican clergy and members of Parliament. Like a magnet, however, these liberal policies attracted Dissenters to these religiously benevolent colonies.

Although colonists often emigrated to the New World to escape religious persecution or intolerance, many new Americans readily discriminated against others on the basis of religion. Nine of the thirteen American colonies authorized established churches--the Congregational Church in New England and the Anglican Church in the Middle and Southern colonies. Established churches

attracted settlers who wanted the cohesiveness of a common religion. In these colonies tax revenues usually supported ministers of the established church, and the right to hold office and to vote were sometimes restricted to members of that church.

The first twelve American colonies were founded during the seventeenth century. Much of the fear and hatred of Catholics in England during this time found its way across the Atlantic. The four imperial wars between Protestant Great Britain and Catholic France and Spain intensified American animosity toward Catholics. Only in Maryland did Catholics find a welcome haven in Britain's New World.

Jews, although discriminated against in every colony, were generally tolerated and prospered especially in Newport, Philadelphia, and Charleston. After the Revolution, even the most tolerant states continued to deny citizenship and voting rights to Jews, although they were allowed to practice their religion, but usually not publicly. In addressing President George Washington when he visited Rhode Island in 1790, the Hebrew congregation of Newport hoped that the government under the new Constitution might provide them with "the invaluable rights of free Citizens" which they had been heretofore denied. Washington praised Americans for giving

to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only

that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens.”¹

Not, however, until the nineteenth century did states extend full citizenship to Jews.

Quakers--banished, whipped, fined, imprisoned, and occasionally executed in early New England--found a refuge in William Penn's experiment. Discrimination against Quakers, even in Pennsylvania, intensified during and after the Revolution, especially against those who steadfastly practiced pacifism. The combatants--both British and Americans--felt that if Quakers were not on their side, they must be enemies. During the war, Quakers were disenfranchised, and Americans rounded up wealthy Quakers thought to be dangerous and transported them to safe areas away from the fighting and their homes. Only slowly after the war were Quaker voting rights restored.

Religion played a significant role in the coming of the American Revolution. In New York the demand by some for an American Anglican bishopric raised fears of heightened ecclesiastical controls similar to the civil controls being mandated by Parliament. American animosity and fear of Catholics increased, especially when Parliament enacted the Quebec Act in 1774 which extended southward the borders of the captured Catholic French territory to the Ohio River and guaranteed “the free Exercise of the Religion of the Church of Rome.” The Declaration of Independence listed the Quebec Act as one of the charges against the king and Parliament. Ironically, because of America's desperate need for support in its struggle for independence, Congress allied with Catholic France, and His Christian Majesty Louis XVI was regularly toasted in America as a true friend of the new republic.

¹ Dorothy Twohig, ed., *The Papers of George Washington*. (Charlottesville, Va., 1996), Presidential Series, Vol. VI, 285-86.

The American Revolution led to a significant separation between church and state. Increasingly religion was thought to be a matter of personal opinion which should not be dictated by government. Of the nine states that had established religions during the colonial period, three separated church and state in their new constitutions—New York, North Carolina, and Virginia. In the remaining six states, concessions were made allowing public support of more than one church. Often, in New England, this concession was nominal because public funds would be given to only one church in a town, and that always happened to be the Congregational church because of its dominance in every New England town. However, as the eighteenth century ended, most states in which tax revenues supported churches passed legislation increasing the flexibility individuals had of earmarking their taxes for the support of their own minister. A continuing relationship between church and state was still considered important. This was made explicit in Massachusetts, where their Declaration of Rights of 1780 provided that because “the happiness of a people, and the good order and preservation of civil government, essentially depend upon piety, religion and morality,” the legislature was required to provide public revenues to support ministers. Furthermore, the legislature had the authority “to enjoin upon all the subjects an attendance upon the public instructions of the public teachers.”

Virginia disestablished the Anglican church merely by not specifically retaining the church-state relationship. The last provision of the Virginia Declaration of Rights (adopted in June 1776 and among the first political acts of James Madison) provided “That 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.” But when in the 1780s Patrick Henry, Edmund Pendleton, and Richard Henry Lee joined with Anglican ministers in an effort to provide public financial support for all Christian denominations (in essence creating a multiple establishment) James Madison revived Thomas Jefferson's bill for religious freedom which provided for the true separation of church and state. A convention of Presbyterian ministers advocated the bill “as the best safeguard short of a constitutional one, for their religious rights.”² The advocates of the general assessment measure all supported liberty of conscience and toleration, but because they strongly believed that Christianity was needed to support public morality and because ministers were woefully underpaid by their congregations, they felt that Christian clergy needed the financial support of the state. Jefferson's bill, adopted in January 1786, stated “that the opinions of men are not the object of civil government, nor under its jurisdiction.” The act provided

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.

Madison happily reported to Jefferson that the act “extinguished for ever the ambitious hope of making laws for the human mind.”³

² Madison to Jefferson, Richmond, January 22, 1786, Robert A. Rutland et al., eds., *The Papers of James Madison*. (Chicago, 1973), VIII, 473.

³ *Ibid.*, 474.

In other state constitutions, like New York's, explicit provision was made that "the free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference, shall for ever hereafter be allowed within this State to all mankind." Religious liberty was not unlimited, however. According to the New York constitution, "the liberty of conscience hereby granted, shall not be so construed, as to excuse acts of licentiousness, or justify practices inconsistent with the peace or safety of this State." But this was a religious liberty rare in the world. Such a libertarian position alienated Congregationalists in Vermont who felt unsafe under New York's rule because their "religious rights and priviledges would be in danger from a Union with a Government" whose constitution tolerated all religions and excluded the establishment of any.⁴ In 1777 the Vermonters declared their independence not only from Great Britain, but also from New York.

Five state constitutions prohibited ministers from holding civil or military positions. The clergy, it was argued, should attend to the important job of tending to their flocks. Eleven states retained a religious test for officeholding, usually requiring belief in God, the Protestant religion, the divine inspiration of the Bible, the trinity, and in life in the hereafter. Only the constitutions of New York and Virginia omitted a religious test for officeholding. In New York Huguenot-descended John Jay argued unsuccessfully in the provincial convention for a prohibition against Catholic officeholding. In February 1788, however, the New York legislature approved an act requiring officeholders to renounce all foreign authorities, "in all matters ecclesiastical as well as civil," an obvious exclusion of Catholics from holding office.

⁴ Egbert Benson to John Jay, Poughkeepsie, July 6, 1779, Henry P. Johnston, ed., *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay* (4 vols., New York, 1890-1893), I, 211-12.

Throughout the Revolutionary era, Congress, the state governors, and the first presidents all issued proclamations for fasting and thanksgiving. James Madison later regretted that such connection between state and religion had occurred. The Articles of Confederation made only indirect reference to religion. In Article III the states bound themselves together “in a league of friendship” to secure themselves from attacks on “any of them, on account of religion, sovereignty, trade or any other pretence whatever.” In the last article, “the Great Governor of the World” was acknowledged for being pleased with the states' ratification of the Articles. As with all of America's fundamental documents, the Articles were dated “in the year of our Lord. . . .”

During and after the war, the states ceded their western lands to Congress. On July 13, 1787--when the Constitutional Convention was meeting in Philadelphia--Congress, meeting in New York City, adopted the Northwest Ordinance which provided for the territorial government of the national domain north and west of the Ohio River and for its transition to statehood on an equal basis with the original states. The Ordinance included an abbreviated bill of rights guaranteeing religious freedom in the first article. “No person demeaning himself in a peaceable and orderly manner shall ever be molested on account of his mode of worship or religious sentiments in the said territory.” The third article acknowledged the necessity of “Religion, morality and knowledge” in promoting “good government and the happiness of mankind” and provided that “schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.” Two years later the first federal Congress reenacted the Ordinance.

Increasingly the Founding Fathers abandoned traditional Christian religion and became what could be called deists. Many of these converts publicly maintained their original religious affiliations, choosing to avoid the censures that prominent deists like Jefferson, Franklin and Paine regularly received.

Deists abandoned the belief in the divinity of Jesus, the trinity, any notion of predestination, the Bible as the divinely inspired word of God, and state-sponsored religion. Rather, deists believed in one God, a benevolent initiator of all events. The word of God was not to be found in the Bible, but in nature and the Creation. Deists believed that Jesus had lived and that his morality and teachings were estimable. They believed that Christian clergy and priests of other religions had perverted the true religion. The way to God was open to all men, and a direct relationship could exist between man and God without the assistance of clergy, Jesus or the state. Deists believed in the importance of living a moral life and following the dictates of conscience. Although uncertain about the nature of the hereafter, deists believed in a life after death. The basic tenet of deism was perhaps best expressed by Thomas Paine in the first volume of the *Age of Reason*, published in 1794.

The only idea man can affix to the name of God, is, that of a FIRST CAUSE, the cause of all things. And incomprehensibly difficult as it is for man to conceive what a first cause is, he arrives at the belief of it, from the tenfold greater difficulty of disbelieving it. It is difficult beyond description to conceive that space can have no end; but it is more difficult to conceive an end. It is difficult beyond the power of man to conceive an eternal duration of what we call time; but it is more impossible to conceive a time when there shall be no time. In like manner of reasoning, every thing we behold carries in itself the internal evidence that it did not make itself . . .; and it is the conviction arising from this evidence, that carries us on, as it were, by necessity, to the belief of a first cause eternally existing, of a nature totally different to any material existence we know of, and

by the power of which all things exist, and this first cause man calls God.

When the delegates to the Federal Convention of 1787 drafted a new Constitution for the United States, they omitted any specific references to God or religion. However, during the debate over ratifying the Constitution, Federalists sometimes asserted that the Constitution was divinely inspired. James Madison asserted in *The Federalist* No. 37 that “It is impossible for the man of pious reflection not to perceive in it [the drafting of the Constitution], a finger of that Almighty hand which has been so frequently and signally extended to our relief in the critical stages of the revolution.” Dr. Benjamin Rush in the Pennsylvania ratifying Convention in December 1787 suggested that “the hand of God” was assuredly employed in drafting the Constitution as it was in dividing the Red Sea or in fulminating the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai. Rush urged Antifederalists to differentiate between the inclinations of their constituents and the dictates of their consciences. Listen, Rush admonished, to the latter. “It is the voice of God speaking” to their hearts. Antifederalists condemned “this new species of DIVINE RIGHT.” They “regretted that so imperfect a work should have been ascribed to God.”⁵

The Constitution provides no religious test for officeholding and, in fact, prohibits one from ever being required. Federalists argued that religious tests were “useless, tyrannical, and peculiarly unfit for the people of this country.”⁶ Religious oaths were supposed to guarantee honorable public service for fear of incurring the wrath of God. Public officials who violated their oaths might escape punishment here on earth but could not avoid punishment in the hereafter. But Federalists argued that the unscrupulous and hypocritical would readily

⁵ Merrill Jensen, John P. Kaminski and Gaspare J. Saladino, eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution* (20 vols. to date, Madison, Wis., 1976-), II, 593, 595. Hereafter cited as DHRC.

⁶ “A Landholder” VII (Oliver Ellsworth), *Connecticut Courant*, December 17, 1787, DHRC, III, 498.

subscribe to oaths and would not hesitate to violate them. Only the conscientious--those who would be the best public officials--would refuse to take a religious oath if they did not believe in its provisions. Thus test laws were totally ineffectual and in fact counterproductive. Antifederalists raised the specter of Jews, Turks, and infidels being elected to key federal positions, while Federalists argued that voters would be knowledgeable enough to select the best people to serve.

Some Antifederalists wanted the Constitution explicitly to acknowledge the existence of God and a dependence on Him. William Williams of Connecticut suggested an addition to the Preamble which should read:

We the people of the United States, in a firm belief of the being and perfections of the one living and true God, the creator and supreme Governor of the world, in His universal providence and the authority of His laws: that He will require of all moral agents an account of their conduct, that all rightful powers among men are ordained of, and mediately derived from God, therefore in a dependence on His blessing and acknowledgment of His efficient protection in establishing our Independence, whereby it is become necessary to agree upon and settle a Constitution of federal government for ourselves, and in order to form a more perfect union, etc.⁷

A week later Williams was answered by the pseudonymous writer "Elihu." "A low mind may imagine that God, like a foolish old man, will think himself slighted and dishonored if he is not complimented with a seat or a prologue of recognition in the Constitution, but those great philosophers who formed the

⁷ Hartford *American Mercury*, February 11, 1788, DHRC, III, 589.

Constitution had a higher idea of the perfection of that INFINITE MIND which governs all worlds than to suppose they could add to his honor or glory, or that He would be pleased with such low familiarity or vulgar flattery.” The framers avoided such demagoguery. “They come to us in the plain language of common sense and propose to our understanding a system of government as the invention of mere human wisdom; no deity comes down to dictate it, not even a God appears in a dream to propose any part of it.”⁸ Some Federalists, Benjamin Rush being one, would not have agreed.

Many Americans agreed with the freemen of Paxton, Mass., that the Constitution, by its failure explicitly to guarantee the freedom of religion, was “Subversive of Liberty and Extreamly dangerous to the Civil and Religious rights of the People.”⁹ Speaking for Antifederalists, Patrick Henry argued in the Virginia ratifying Convention that the “sacred and lovely thing Religion, ought not to rest on the ingenuity of logical deduction.” Without an explicit protection, religion “will be prostituted to the lowest purposes of human policy.”¹⁰ Federalists, however, argued that the Constitution would create a federal government of strictly enumerated powers that would never be capable of violating religious liberty. According to James Madison in the Virginia Convention, there was “not a shadow of right in the General Government to intermeddle with religion—Its least interference with it would be a most flagrant usurpation.” Furthermore, with the “multiplicity of sects” throughout America, Madison asserted that no one sect “could oppress and persecute the rest.”¹¹

Throughout the ratification debate Antifederalists demanded that freedom of religion be protected. A majority of ratifying conventions recommended that

⁸ “Elihu,” *Hartford American Mercury*, February 18, 1788, DHRC, III, 592.

⁹ DHRC, V, 1003.

¹⁰ DHRC, X, 1213.

¹¹ DHRC, X, 1223-24.

an amendment guaranteeing religious freedom be added to the Constitution. In recommending a bill of rights in the first federal Congress on June 8, 1789, Madison proposed that “the civil rights of none shall be abridged on account of religious belief or worship, nor shall any national religion be established, nor shall the full and equal rights of conscience be in any manner or on any pretext infringed.” He also proposed that “no state shall violate the equal rights of conscience.”¹²

The prohibition on states was removed by the Senate, while the restrictions on the federal government were combined and recast into what came to be the First Amendment: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The exact meaning of this prohibition has not been easy to ascertain. Perhaps President Thomas Jefferson interpreted it best in his response to the Baptist Association of Danbury, Conn., on January 1, 1802.

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 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.¹³

¹² Helen E. Veit, Kenneth R. Bowling, and Charlene Bangs Bickford, eds., *Creating the Bill of Rights: The Documentary Record from the First Federal Congress* (Baltimore, 1991), 12-13.

¹³ Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Thomas Jefferson: Writings* (New York, 1984), 510.

ABIGAIL ADAMS

The only sure and permanent foundation of virtue is religion. Let this important truth be engraved upon your heart. And also, that the foundation of religion is the belief of the one only God, and a just sense of his attributes, as a being infinitely wise; just, and good, to whom you owe the highest reverence, gratitude, and adoration; who superintends and governs all nature, even to clothing the lilies of the field, and hearing the young ravens when they cry; but more particularly regards man, whom he created after his own image, and breathed into him an immortal spirit, capable of a happiness beyond the grave; for the attainment of which he is bound to the performance of certain duties, which all tend to the happiness and welfare of society, and are comprised in one short sentence, expressive of universal benevolence, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." This is elegantly defined by Mr. Pope, in the "Essay on Man."

"Remember, man, the universal cause
Acts not by partial, but by general laws,
And makes what happiness we justly call,
Subsist not in the good of one, but all.
There's not a blessing individuals find,
But some ways leans and hearkens to the kind."

Thus has the Supreme Being made the good will of man towards his fellow-creatures an evidence of his regard to Him, and for this purpose has constituted him a dependent being and made his happiness to consist in society. Man early discovered this propensity of his nature, and found

"Eden was tasteless till an Eve was there."

Abigail Adams to John Quincy Adams, March 20, 1780

... however the Belief of a particular Providence may be exploded by the Modern Wits, and the Infidelity of too many of the rising generation deride the Idea, yet the virtuous Mind will look up and acknowledge the great first cause, without whose notice not even a sparrow falls to the ground.

... but there is one consolation to which I must ever resort, in all my anxietyes. I thank Heaven who has given me to believe in a superintending providence Guiding and Governing all things in infinite wisdom and "to look through and Trust the Ruler of the Skye."

Abigail Adams to John Adams, October 15, 1780

Placed as we are in a transitory scene of probation, drawing nigher and still nigher day after day to that important crisis which must introduce us into a new system of things, it ought certainly to be our principal concern to become qualified for our expected dignity.

Abigail Adams to John Quincy Adams, Braintree, November 20, 1783

Since I have been here and the pulpit has been supplied as they could procure Labourers—by Gentlemen who preach without Notes, all of whom are predestinarians and whose Noise & vehemence is to compensate for every other difficiency.

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, October 4, 1789

Bred a desenter and approveing that mode of worship, I feel a reluctance at changing tho I would always go to church, if I resided where there was no other mode of worship.

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, October 4, 1789

The Clergyman is Dr. Lynn one of the Chapling to congress and I think a better preacher than most that I have heard to day. An oration is [to] be delivered by Dr. Livingstone the other Minister belonging to this Church, but as to an orater, the oratory of a Clergyman here consists in foaming, loud speaking, working themselves up in such an enthusiasm as to cry, but which has no other effect upon me than to raise my pittty. O when when shall I hear the Candour & liberal good sense of a [Richard] Price again, animated with true piety without enthusiasm, devotion without grimace and Religion upon a Rational system.

To Mary Cranch, New York, July 4, 1790

Half the year I must sit under as strong Calvinism as I can possibly swallow.

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, December 12, 1797

As we descend the Hill of Life, our gay and visionary prospect vanish, and what gilded our Meridian days, our Zenith of Life, as the Shadows lengthen , we see through a

different medium and may justly estimate many of our pursuits, as vanity and vexation of spirit.

“But theres a Brighter world on high” which opens to us prospects more permanent, and pleasures more durable, To that let us aspire in the sure and certain hope, that by a patient Continuence in the path of Religion and Virtue, we shall assuredly reap, if we faint not, the happy fruits of a glorious immortality.

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, March 27, 1798

You observe in it, that you are not fond of mixing Religion with politicks. That is the Idea. I know not (as the paper is lent,) whether I have the exact words. I think however when Religion has been equally attackd with the Liberty and Government of the Country, it is proper to manifest a due Respect for that upon which both the other Rest. I have been assured from respectable Authority that the opportunity which the Chief Majestrate has embraced of bearing publick testimony to Religion, in his replies to many of the addresses presented him, and his pointed disapprobation of infidelity, has done more to stop the progress of it, and to bring into disrepute French principles than all the Sermons preachd by the Clergy of our Country.

Abigail Adams to John Adams, Quincy, January 20, 1799

Where is the situation in Life which exempts us from trouble? Who of us pass through the world with our path strewed with flowers, without encountering the thorns? In what ever state we are, we shall find a mixture of good and evil, and we must learn to receive these vicissitudes of life, so as not to be unduly exalted by the one, or depressed by the other. No cup so bitter, but what some cordial drops are mingled by a kind Providence, who knows how . . . to “temper the wind to the Shorn Lamb.*

*An ancient French proverb made popular by Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*.

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, East Chester, N.Y., October 31, 1799

I do not believe that a people are ever made better by always hearing of the terrors of the Lord. Gloom is no part of my Religion.

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, November 26, 1799

To maintain a conscience void of offence, as far as is consistant with the imperfect State we are in, both towards God and Man, is one article of my Faith, and to do good as I have opportunity, and according to my means I would wish to make the Rule of my practise. Do justly, walk Humbly and to Love mercy—are duties enjoined upon every Christian, and if we can attain to those graces, we may cheerfully look for our recompence and reward, where it is promised to us.

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, November 26, 1799

We all have much to be forgiven, and as we hope for mercy, so may we extend it to others.

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, May 3, 1800

Altho I sometimes feel my own insignificance in the creation, especially when contemplating the first Good, first perfect and first fair, I derive pleasure and assurance from the word of inspiration—that not a swallow falleth without notice.

Abigail Adams to John Quincy Adams, July 1, 1813

When I look in my Glass I see that I am not what I was. I scarcely know a feature of my face. But I believe that this Mortal Body shall one day put on immortality and be renovated in the World of Spirits. Having enjoyed a large portion of the good things of this life and few of its miseries, I ought to rise satisfied from the feast, and be gratefull to the Giver.

Abigail Adams to John Quincy Adams, Quincy, May 10, 1817

When will Mankind be convinced true religion is from the Heart, between Man and his Creator and not the Imposition of Man or creeds and tests.

Abigail Adams to Louisa Catherine Adams, Quincy, January 3, 1818

In one thing we agree that he who feareth God, and worketh righteousness shall be accepted of him and his Faith cannot be wrong whose life is in the right.

Abigail Adams to Louisa Catherine Adams, Quincy, April 15, 1818

Clergy

I rejoice in a preacher who has some warmth, some energy, some feeling. Deliver me from your cold phlegmatick Preachers, Politicians, Friends, Lovers and Husbands. I thank Heaven I am not so constituted my-self and so connected.

Abigail Adams to John Adams, August 5, 1776

God

God is like a refuge for us.

Abigail Adams to John Adams, Braintree, June 8, 1775

I will not distrust the providential Care of the supream disposer of events, from whose Hand I have so frequently received distinguished favours.

Abigail Adams to John Adams, April 10, 1782

From the Scriptures I learn that there is but one God to whom worship is due. That he is the Creator Preserver and Governor of universal Nature, Thou shalt have no other Gods before me is the first command after that of loving God. There is no other Being of whom we have sufficient reason to think that he is constantly present with us and a witness of all our thoughts words and actions. And there is no other Being to whom our supplications ought to be addressed. The language of Jesus Christ is "thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

Abigail Adams to Louisa Catherine Adams, April 15, 1818

Government and Religion

I wish with you that I could see as great a Change for the better in Morals as in politicks, but it is a part of Religion as well as morality, to do justly and to love mercy

and a man can not be an honest & Zealous promoter of the Principles of a True Government, without possessing that Good will towards man which leads to the Love of God, and respect for the Deity; so that a proper appreciation of our Rights & Duties as Citizens, it is a prelude to a respect for Religion, and its institutions.

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, May 26, 1798

The Hereafter

Why may we not suppose, that, the higher our attainments in knowledge and virtue are here on earth, the more nearly we assimilate ourselves to that order of beings who now rank above us in the world of spirits? We are told in scripture, that there are different kinds of glory, and that one star differeth from another. Why should not those who have distinguished themselves by superior excellence over their fellow-mortals continue to preserve their rank when admitted to the kingdom of the just? Though the estimation of worth may be very different in the view of the righteous Judge of the world from that which vain man esteems such on earth, yet we may rest assured that justice will be strictly administered to us.

Abigail Adams to Lucy Cranch, London, August 27, 1785

If it was not for the sure and certain hope of a superiour state of existance beyond this transitory scene of Noise, Bustle, pain & anxiety—we should be of all Beings the most miserable

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, May 7, 1798

What is to be our future Lot, and Destiny, remains to be unfolded. I hope we may still Continue to be “that happy people saved of the Lord.”

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, May 7, 1798

Mrs. Field is relieved from the infirmities under which she sufferd, and having acted well; very well, her part in Life, will, I doubt not, have her reward.

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Philadelphia, June 4, 1798

We must live all the days of our appointed time, and when our change commeth, may it be happy to us.

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Washington, January 15, 1801

Your Friends tho not exempt from the infirmities of age, are in the enjoyment of many blessings, amongst which is a comfortable portion of Health, and rural felicity. We enjoy the present with gratitude, and look forward to brighter prospects and more durable happiness in a future state of existence, where we hope to meet and rejoice with those whom we have loved, and revered upon Earth.

Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, Quincy, January 16, 1803

Your Letter, my dear Madam, written so much in the stile of Mrs. Warren's ancient Friendship, renewed all those sensations which formerly gave me pleasure, and from which I have derived sincere and durable gratification, and I anticipate a still closer and more cordial union in the world of spirits to which we are hastening, when these earthly tabernacles shall be mouldered into Dust.

Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, Quincy, March 9, 1807

However we may live there is not any religion by which we can die but the Christian which gives us the glorious prospect of life eternal. If says the Apostle in this Life only we have hope; we are of all men the most miserable.

Abigail Adams to John Quincy Adams, January 26, 1811

Submission to the Will of God

So short sighted and so little a way can we look into futurity that we ought patiently to submit to the dispensation of Heaven.

Abigail Adams to John Adams, Braintree, July 16, 1777

An all wise Providence has seen fit to curtail our wishes and to limit our enjoyments, that we may not be unmindfull of our dependance or forget the Hand from whence they flow.

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Richmond Hill, July 12, 1789

Any calamity inflicted by the hand of Providence, it would become me in silence to submit to.

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, East Chester, N.Y., October 31, 1799

Any calamity inflicted by the hand of Providence, it would become me in silence to submit to, but when I behold misery and distress, disgrace and poverty, brought upon a Family by intemperance, my heart bleeds at every pore.

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, East Chester, October 31, 1799

[On the death of Charles Adams]: The Mercy of the almighty is not limited; To his sovereign will I desire humbly to submit.

Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, Washington, December 8, 1800

To the Sovereign Disposer of all events, I would strive cheerfully to submit,

Abigail Adams to Caroline Smith, Quincy, August 12, 1809

Unitarianism

There is not any reasoning which can convince me, contrary to my senses, that three, is one and one three. Is it possible for the humane mind to form an idea of the Supreme Being, without some visible qualities such as wisdom, power, and goodness. The creator, preserver and governor of the world. The first commandment forbids the worship of but one God. That Jesus Christ was sent into the world by the Father to take upon him humane nature, to exalt, redeem and purify the world, to set an example to all his followers of sinless obedience and holiness of life and conversation, and to bring life and immortality to light, the scriptures fully testify, and that a conformity to his precepts and

example, as far as humane nature is capable of it, will be rewarded by future happiness in the world to come, is my firm belief.

Is there not a subordination to the Father manifested in the whole life and character of Jesus Christ? Why said he call ye me good. There is none good but one that is God. Again, I do nothing of myself, but the Father in me. . . . From these and many other passages of scripture, I am led to believe in the unity of the Supreme Being.

Abigail Adams to John Quincy Adams, Quincy, May 4, 1816

The Will of God

Blessed be God, his Ear is not heavy that he cannot hear, but he has bid us call upon him in time of Trouble.

Abigail Adams to John Adams, Weymouth, October 1, 1775

My poor father like a firm Believer and a Good christian sets before his children the best of Examples of patience and submission.

Abigail Adams to John Adams, Weymouth, October 1, 1775

The ways of Heaven are dark and intricate.

Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, Quincy, March 9, 1807

Let us ask the rising year, now open to our view yet wrapped in darkness, whither dost thou lead? Let cheerful hope receive the welcome guest, gratefully recollecting the many blessings of the past year, and committing ourselves to the wise and overruling Providence, who suffers not a sparrow to fall to the ground without his notice.

Abigail Adams to Caroline Smith, Quincy, February 2, 1809

To a mind elevated and endowed like your own, full of confidence and hope, you can look through nature to Nature's God and trust the Ruler of the skies, sure that all events are permitted and controuled, by infinite wisdom, justice, and Benevolence.

Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, Quincy, May 5, 1815

JOHN ADAMS

The Bible

Philosophy looks with an impartial Eye on all terrestrial religions. I have examined all, as well as my narrow Sphere, my streightened means and my busy Life would allow me; and the result is, that the Bible is the best book in the World. It contains more of my little Philosophy than all the Libraries, I have seen: and such Parts of it as I cannot reconcile to my little Philosophy I postpone for future Investigation.

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Quincy, December 25, 1813

Catholicism

I have this Day been to a Romish Chappell. My Imagination is so full of holy Water, Crossings, Bowings, Kneelings and Genuflections, Images, Paintings, Crucifixs, Velvet, Gold, but above all, the Musick. I am amazed that Luther and Calvin, were ever able to break the Charm and dissolve the spell.

John Adams to William Tudor, Philadelphia, October 7, 1774

Clergy

The clergy in all ages and countries, and in this in particular, are disposed enough to be on the side of government, as long as it is tolerable. If they have not been generally in the late administrations on that side, it is demonstration that the late administration has been universally odious.

John Adams, Novanglus, February 13, 1775

It is the duty of the clergy to accommodate their discourses to the times, to preach against such sins as are most prevalent, and recommend such virtues as are most wanted. For example, if exorbitant ambition, and venality are predominant, ought they not to warn their hearers against these vices? If public spirit is much wanted, should they not inculcate this great virtue?

John Adams, Novanglus, February 13, 1775

Creed

I have . . . made no Change in my moral or religious Creed, which has for 50 or 60 Years been contained in four short Words "Be just and good."

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Quincy, December 12, 1816

Let us do our duty which is, to do as we would be done by, and that one would think, could not be difficult, if we honestly aim at it.

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Quincy, January 22, 1825

God

It appears to me, that the great Principle of the Hebrews was the *Fear* of God; that of the Gentiles, *Honour* the Gods, that of Christians, the *Love* of God.

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Quincy, September 22, 1813

Knowing God

I own, an eternal Solitude of a Self existent Being infinitely wise, powerful and good, is to me, altogether incomprehensible, and incredible. . . . It would be Presumptive and Impiety in me to dogmatize, on such Subjects. My duties, in my little infinitesimal Circle I can understand and feel. The Duties of a Son, a Brother, a Father, a Neighbour, a Citizen, I can see and feel: But I trust the Ruler with his Skies.

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Quincy, September 15, 1813

When we say God is Spirit, we know what we mean as well as we do when we say that the Pyramids of Egypt are Matter. Let us be content therefore to believe Him to be a Spirit, that is, an Essence that we know nothing of, in which Originally and necessarily reside all energy, all Power, all Capacity, all Activity, all Wisdom, all Goodness.

Behold the Creed and Confession of Faith of your ever affectionate Friend.

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Montezillo, January 20, 1820

Sixty years ago . . . and from that time to this I have been fully persuaded that we know nothing of Essences, that some Essence does exist, which causes our minds with all their ideas, and this visible World with all its wonders. I am certain that this Cause is wise, Benevolent and powerful, beyond all conception; I cannot doubt, but what it is, I cannot conjecture.

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Montezillo, May 12, 1820

That there is an active principle of power in the Universe is apparent, but in what substance that active principle of power resides, is past our investigation. The faculties of our understanding are not adequate to penetrate the Universe.

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Quincy, January 22, 1825

God and the Revolution

Providence has hitherto preserved Us, and I firmly believe will continue to do so.

John Adams to James Warren, May 18, 1776

God's Will

The designs of providence are inscrutable. It affords to bad men, conjunctures favourable for their designs, as well as to good.

John Adams, Novanglus, January 30, 1775

The Hereafter

If human Life is a Bubble, no matter how soon it breaks. If it is as I firmly believe an immortal Existence, We ought patiently to wait the Instructions of the great Teacher.

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Quincy, October 20, 1818

I know not how to prove physically that We shall meet and know each other in a future State; Nor does Revelation, as I can find give Us any positive Assurance of

such a felicity. My reasons for believing, it, as I do, most undoubtedly, are all moral and divine.

I believe in God and in his Wisdom and Benevolence: and I cannot conceive that such a Being could make such a Species as the human merely to live and die on this Earth. If I did not believe a future State I should believe in no God. This Universe; this all; this totality; would appear with all its swelling Pomp, a boyish Fire Work.

And if there be a future State Why should the Almighty dissolve forever all the tender Ties which Unite Us so delightfully in this World and forbid Us to see each other in the next?

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Quincy, December 8, 1818

We shall meet hereafter and laugh at our present botherations.

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Montezillo, May 12, 1820

Religion

I am for the most liberal Toleration of all Denominations of Religionists but I hope that Congress will never meddle with Religion, further than to Say their own Prayers, and to fast and give Thanks, once a Year. Let every Colony, have its own Religion, without Molestation.

John Adams to Benjamin Kent, Philadelphia, June 22, 1776

Religion and Virtue are the only Foundations, not only of Republicanism and of all free Government, but of social felicity under all Governments and in all Combinations of human Society.

John Adams to Benjamin Rush, August 28, 1811

The Ten Commandments and The Sermon on the Mount contain my Religion.

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Quincy, November 4, 1816

Twenty times, in the course of my late Reading have I been upon the point of breaking out, "this would be the best of all possible Worlds if there were no Religion

in it”!!! But in this exclamation I should have been as fanatical as [Lemuel] Bryant or [Joseph] Cleverly.* Without Religion this World would be Something not fit to be mentioned in polite Company, I mean Hell.

*Massachusetts Congregational ministers.

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Quincy, April 19, 1817

Resignation to the Will of God

Providence can neither be resisted, nor persuaded, nor fathomed. Implicit Resignation is our greatest Wisdom, both as our Duty, and as the only sufficient source of Tranquility. Relying on this foundation, we shall endeavour to turn our Thoughts as much as we can, from irretrievable Misfortunes, and towards the means of procuring, according to the Probabilities of Things, future Peace and Pleasure.

John Adams to Jonathan Sewall, Braintree, post September 10, 1760

There is but one Being in the Universe, who comprehends it; and our last Resource is Resignation.

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Quincy, March 2, 1816

The Universe

I see Millions of Worlds and systems of Worlds, swarming with Inhabitants, all engaged in the same Active Investigation of the great System of Universal and eternal Truth, and overflowing with Felicity.

John Adams to Jonathan Sewall, February 1760

JOHN ADAMS

Massachusetts Constitution of 1780

Committee of 30 to write constitution; committee of three (John and Sam Adams, and James Bowdoin) to do writing; they delegate it to John. He writes all but Article III, concerning the support of the clergy.

He says of Article III: "The Article respecting Religion . . . was the only Article which I omitted to draw. I could not Satisfy my own Judgment with any Article that I thought would be accepted: and farther that Some of the Clergy, or older and graver Persons than myself would be more likely to hit the Taste of the Public" (to William D. Williamson, 25 Feb. 1812).

It was extremely controversial and debated extensively in the Convention; probably it did not win 2/3 support of the towns. But Adams supported it; Backus says he won votes for it by accusing Backus of threatening the unity of the opposition to Britain in 1774, when he opposed compulsory support of the Congregational Church (Taylor, AAS Proceedings, 90:333). When Backus had complained in 1774 Adams had called the Mass. establishment "a very slender one." (Morison, MHS Proceedings, 50:375-76)

Preamble: says people acknowledge "with grateful hearts, the goodness of the great Legislator of the universe, in affording to this people, in the course of His providence, an opportunity" of forming a constitution, and "devoutly imploring His direction in a design so interesting." (Adams, Works, 4:220)

Article II: "It is the duty of all men in society, publicly, and at stated seasons, to worship the Supreme Being, the great Creator and Preserver of the universe. And no subject shall be hurt, molested, or restrained in his person, liberty, or estate for worshipping God in the manner most agreeable to the dictates of his own conscience; or, for his religious profession or sentiments; provided he doth not disturb the public peace, or obstruct others in their religious worship." (Adams, Works, IV, 221)

Constitution of 1778 had simply said: "The free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship shall forever be allowed to every denomination of Protestants within this State." (Handlin, 201)

Article III: Added in Convention: "And every denomination of Christians,

demeaning themselves peaceably and as good subjects of the commonwealth, shall be equally under the protection of the law; and no subordination of any one sect or denomination to another shall ever be established by law.” In 1820 Mass. Convention, Adams was a member, though he didn’t attend much. He had the following proposed for him: “that in the third article of the Declaration of Rights, the words, ‘all men, of all religions, demeaning themselves as good subjects, shall enjoy the equal protection of the laws,’ should be inserted instead of the words, ‘men of every denomination of Christians.’” Motion was defeated. (Adams, Works, 4:223n)

Text of Article III: “As the happiness of a people, and the good order and preservation of civil government, essentially depend upon piety, religion and morality; and as these cannot be generally diffused through a community, but by the institution of the public worship of God, and of public instructions in piety, religion and morality: Therefore, to promote their happiness, and to secure the good order and preservation of their government, the people of this Commonwealth have a right to invest their legislature with power to authorize and require, and the legislature shall, from time to time, authorize and require, the several towns, parishes, precincts, and other bodies politic, or religious societies, to make suitable provision, at their own expence, for the institution of the public worship of God, and for the support and maintenance of public protestant teachers of piety, religion and morality, in all cases where such provision shall not be made voluntarily.

And all monies paid by the subject to support of public worship, and of the public teachers aforesaid, shall, if he require it, be uniformly applied to the support of the public teacher or teachers of his own religious sect or denomination, provided there be any on whose instructions he attends; otherwise it may be paid towards the support of the teacher or teachers of the parish or precinct in which the said monies are raised.”

Article III even less liberal than the provincial system:

... it did not exempt Baptists and Quakers, Anglicans; it merely gave them the privilege of paying their taxes to their own pastors. Everyone else had to contribute to

Congregational worship.

Every new denomination had to be recognized as a religious sect, such as Universalists and Methodists. (Morison, MHS Proceedings, 50:371). Though in 19th century, when Universalists became majorities, and Congreg. seceded and became dissenters, they got no redress and complained bitterly. In Boston, only, support for churches was voluntary (ibid., 375, 375n).

Governor and legislators and those appointed to civil and military office were to be Christian and oath of office required that one swear or affirm that one was persuaded of the truth of the Christian religion.

On floor of Convention constant efforts to add the word "Protestant" or "as professed by Protestants."

Oath: of governor: "I ...do now declare, that I believe and profess the Christian religion, from a firm persuasion of its truth...." Ends: "So help me God." (Adams, Works, 4:260, 262) Convention added to oath a declaration "that no foreign prince, person, prelate, etc. had any jurisdiction . . . ecclesiastical, or spiritual, within the Commonwealth." Intended to exclude ultramontane Catholics from office. All religious tests and qualifications for office were removed in constitution of 1821 (Morison, MHS Proceedings, 50:381, 382)

Massachusetts Constitution of 1780

Preamble

The end of the institution, maintenance, and administration of government is to secure the existence of the body-politic, to protect it, and to furnish the individuals who compose it with the power of enjoying, in safety and tranquillity, their natural rights and the blessings of life; and whenever these great objects are not obtained the people

have a right to alter the government, and to take measures necessary for their safety, prosperity, and happiness.

The body politic is formed by a voluntary association of individuals; it is a social compact by which the whole people covenants with each citizen and each citizen with the whole people that all shall be governed by certain laws for the common good. It is the duty of the people, therefore, in framing a constitution of government, to provide for an equitable mode of making laws, as well as for an impartial interpretation and a faithful execution of them; that every man may, at all times, find his security in them.

We, therefore, the people of Massachusetts, acknowledging, with grateful hearts, the goodness of the great Legislator of the universe, in affording us, in the course of His providence, an opportunity, deliberately and peaceably, without fraud, violence, or surprise, of entering into an original, explicit, and solemn compact with each other, and of forming a new constitution of civil government for ourselves and posterity; and devoutly imploring His direction in so interesting a design, do agree upon, ordain, and establish the following declaration of rights and frame of government as the constitution of the commonwealth of Massachusetts.

PART THE FIRST

A Declaration of the Rights of the Inhabitants of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Article I. All men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential, and unalienable rights; among which may be reckoned the right of enjoying and defending their lives and liberties; that of acquiring, possessing, and protecting property; in fine, that of seeking and obtaining their safety and happiness.

Art. II. It is the right as well as the duty of all men in society, publicly and at stated seasons, to worship the Supreme Being, the great Creator and Preserver of the universe. And no subject shall be hurt, molested, or restrained, in his person, liberty, or estate, for worshipping God in the manner and season most agreeable to the dictates of

his own conscience, or for his religious profession or sentiments, provided he doth not disturb the public peace or obstruct others in their religious worship.

Art. III. As the happiness of a people and the good order and preservation of civil government essentially depend upon piety, religion, and morality, and as these cannot be generally diffused through a community but by the institution of the public worship of God and of the public instructions in piety, religion, and morality:

Therefore, To promote their happiness and to secure the good order and preservation of their government, the people of this commonwealth have a right to invest their legislature with power to authorize and require, and the legislature shall, from time to time, authorize and require, the several towns, parishes, precincts, and other bodies-politic or religious societies to make suitable provision, at their own expense, for the institution of the public worship of God and for the support and maintenance of public Protestant teachers of piety, religion, and morality in all cases where such provision shall not be made voluntarily.

And the people of this commonwealth have also a right to, and do, invest their legislature with authority to enjoin upon all the subject an attendance upon the instructions of the public teachers aforesaid, at stated times and seasons, if there be any on whose instructions they can conscientiously and conveniently attend.

Provided, notwithstanding, That the several towns, parishes, precincts, and other bodies-politic, or religious societies, shall at all times have the exclusive right and electing their public teachers and of contracting with them for their support and maintenance.

And all moneys paid by the subject to the support of public worship and of public teachers aforesaid shall, if he require it, be uniformly applied to the support of the public teacher or teachers of his own religious sect or denomination, provided there be any on whose instructions he attends; otherwise it may be paid toward the support of the teacher or teachers of the parish or precinct in which the said moneys are raised.

And every denomination of Christians, demeaning themselves peaceably and as good subjects of the commonwealth, shall be equally under the protection of the law; and no subordination of any sect or denomination to another shall ever be established by law.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

How many observe Christ's birthday! How few, his precepts! O! 'tis easier to keep holidays than commandments.

Benjamin Franklin, Poor Richard's Almanack, c 1732

History will also afford frequent Opportunities of showing the Necessity of a *Publick Religion*, from its Usefulness to the Publick.

Benjamin Franklin, "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania," 1749

Talking against religion is unchaining a tiger; the beast let loose may worry his deliverer.

Benjamin Franklin, Poor Richard's Almanack, 1751

The way to see by faith is to shut the eye of reason.

Benjamin Franklin, Poor Richard's Almanack, 1758

I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proof I see of this truth—that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid?

Benjamin Franklin: Speech in the Constitutional Convention, June 28, 1787

As to Jesus of Nazareth, my Opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think the System of Morals and his Religion, as he left them to us, the best the World ever saw or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting Changes, and I have, with most of the present Dissenters in England, some Doubts as to his Divinity; tho' it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it now, when I expect soon an Opportunity of knowing the Truth with less Trouble.

Benjamin Franklin to Ezra Stiles, March 9, 1790

compare with
orig. p 36

ALEXANDER HAMILTON**Religion and Morality**

To all those dispositions which promote political prosperity, religion and morality are essential props.

Alexander Hamilton to George Washington, New York, July 10, 1796

Religious Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm is certainly a very good thing, but religious enthusiasm is at least a dangerous instrument.

Alexander Hamilton to William Stephens Smith, New York, March 12, 1800

Religious Fanaticism

The world has been scourged with many fanatical sects in religion, who, inflamed by a sincere but mistaken zeal, have perpetuated under the idea of serving God the most atrocious crimes.

Alexander Hamilton, *The Cause of France*, Philadelphia, 1794

JOHN JAY**The Bible**

The Bible is the best of all Books, for it is the word of God, and teaches us the way to be happy in this world and in the next. Continue therefore to read it, and to regulate your Life by its precepts.

John Jay to Peter Augustus Jay, Chaillot, near Paris, April 8, 1784

Being ordained by a legislator of *infinite* wisdom and rectitude, and in whom there is "no variableness," it must be free from imperfection, and therefore never has, nor ever will require amendment or alteration.

John Jay to John Murray, Jr., Bedford, October 12, 1816

God and Man

Providence seldom interposes in human affairs but through the agency of human means.

John Jay to Richard Peters, Bedford, March 29, 1811

He who governs the world can restrain the wrath of man as well as the rage of the ocean.

John Jay to Jedidiah Morse, Bedford, January 1, 1813

God's Infallibility

He who governs all makes no mistakes; and a firm belief of this would save us from many.

John Jay to Sarah Jay, New Haven, April 24, 1792

Religion

Religion, morality, and a virtuous and enlightened clergy will always be impediments to the progress and success of certain systems and designs, and therefore will not cease to experience both direct and indirect hostilities from those who meditate or embark in them.

John Jay to the Rev. Uzal Ogden, New York, February 14, 1796

Compare
with Franklin
in Const.
Cont.
p. 34

Religious Liberty

Adequate security is also given to the rights of conscience and private judgment. They are by nature subject to no control but that of the Deity, and in that free situation they are now left. Every man is permitted to consider, to adore, and to worship his Creator in the manner most agreeable to his conscience. No opinions are dictated, no rules of faith prescribed, no preference given to one sect to the prejudice of others. ^(M.V. & F.M.V.) The constitution, however, has wisely declared, that the "liberty of conscience thereby granted shall not be so construed as to excuse acts of licentiousness or justify practices inconsistent with the peace or safety of the State." In a word, the convention by whom that constitution was formed were of opinion that the gospel of Christ, like the ark of God, would not fall, though unsupported by the arm of flesh; and happy would it be for mankind if that opinion prevailed more generally.

John Jay's Charge to the Grand Jury of Ulster County, September 9, 1777

Civil and religious Liberty is a Blessing which I sincerely wish to all mankind; and I hope it will ever be the policy of these States so to extend and secure it to all their Citizens, as that none may have Reason to complain of Partiality or Oppression.

John Jay to Anthony Benezet, Philadelphia, March 5, 1779

THOMAS JEFFERSON

As to myself, my religious reading has long been confined to the moral branch of religion, which is the same in all religions; while in that branch which consists of dogmas, all differ, all have a different set. The former instructs us how to live well and worthily in society; the latter are made to interest our minds in the support of the teachers who inculcate them. Hence, for one sermon on a moral subject, you hear ten on the dogmas of the sect. However, religion is not the subject for you & me; neither of us know the religious opinions of the other; that is a matter between our maker & ourselves.

Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Leiper, Washington, January 21, 1809

The subject of religion, a subject on which I have ever been most scrupulously reserved, I have considered it as a matter between every man and his maker, in which no other, & far less the public had a right to intermeddle.

Thomas Jefferson to Richard Rush, Monticello, May, 31, 1813

For, dispute as long as we will on religious tenets, our reason at last must ultimately decide, as it is the only oracle which god has given us to determine between what really comes from him & the phantasms of a disordered or deluded imagination. When he means to make a personal revelation he carries conviction of its authenticity to the reason he has bestowed as the umpire of truth. Hitherto I have been under the guidance of that portion of reason which he has thought proper to deal out to me. I have followed it faithfully in all important cases, to such a degree at least as leaves me without uneasiness; and if on minor occasions I have erred from its dictates, I have trust in him who made us what we are, and know it was not his plan to make us always unerring. I must ever believe that religion substantially good which produces an honest life, and we have been authorized by one, whom you and I equally respect, to judge of the tree by its fruit.

Our particular principles of religion are a subject of accountability to our god alone. I inquire after no man's, and trouble none with mine: nor is it given to us in this life to know whether yours or mine; our friends or our foes, are exactly the right. Nay, we have

heard it said that there is not a quaker or a baptist, a presbyterian or an episcopalian, a catholic or a protestant in heaven: that, on entering that gate, we leave those badges of schism behind, and find ourselves united in those principles only in which god has united us all. Let us not be uneasy then about the different roads we may pursue, as believing them the shortest, to that our last abode; but, following the guidance of a good conscience, let us be happy in the hope that, by these different paths, we shall all meet in the end.

Thomas Jefferson to Miles King, Monticello, September 26, 1814

I have ever thought religion a concern purely between our god and our consciences, for which we were accountable to him, and not to the priests. I never told my own religion, nor scrutinized that of another. I never attempted to make a convert, nor wished to change another's creed . . . it is in our lives, and not from our words, that our religion must be read.

Thomas Jefferson to Mrs. M. Harrison Smith, Monticello, August 6, 1816

The result of your 50 or 60 years of religious reading in the four words "be just and good" is that in which all our enquiries must end.

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Monticello, January 11, 1817

Say nothing of my religion. It is known to my god and myself alone. Its evidence before the world is to be sought in my life. If that has been *honest and dutiful to society*, the religion which has regulated it cannot be a bad one.

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Monticello, January 11, 1817

Say nothing of my religion; it is known to my god and myself alone. Its evidence before the world is to be sought in my life. If that has been honest and dutiful to society, the religion which has regulated it cannot be a bad one. It is singular anxiety which some people have that we should all think alike. Would the world be more beautiful were all our faces alike? Were our tempers, our talents, our tastes, our forms, our wishes, aversions, and pursuits cast exactly in the same mould? If no varieties existed in the animal, vegetable, or mineral creation, but all were strictly uniform, catholic and orthodox, what a

world of physical & moral monotony would it be! These are the absurdities into which those run who usurp the throne of god, & dictate to him what he should have done.

Thomas Jefferson to Charles Thomson, January 29, 1817

If, by *religion*, we are to understand *Sectarian dogmas*, in which no two of them agree, then your exclamation on that hypothesis is just, "that this would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it."

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Monticello, May 5, 1817

Were I to be the founder of a new sect, I would call them Apiarians, and after the example of the bees, advise them to extract the honey of every sect. My fundamental principle would be the reverse of Calvin's, that we are to be saved by our good works which are within our power, and not by our faith which is not within our power.

Thomas Jefferson to Thomas B. Parker, Monticello, May 15, 1819

In that branch of religion which regards the moralities of life, and the duties of a social being, which teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to do good to all men, I am sure that you & I do not differ. We probably differ on that which relates to the dogmas of theology, the foundation of all sectarianism, and on which no two sects dream alike; for if they did they would then be of the same. You say you are a Calvinist. I am not. I am of a sect by myself, as far as I know.

Thomas Jefferson to Ezra Stiles, Monticello, June 25, 1819

If the freedom of religion, guaranteed to us by law *in theory*, can ever rise *in practice* under the overbearing inquisition of public opinion, truth will prevail over fanaticism and the genuine doctrines of Jesus, so long perverted by his pseudo-priests, will again be restored to their original purity.

Thomas Jefferson to Jared Sparks, November 4, 1820

I can never join Calvin in addressing *his god*. He was indeed an Atheist, which I can never be.

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Monticello, April 11, 1823

Christianity

The Christian religion, when divested of the rags in which they have enveloped it, and brought to the original purity and simplicity of its benevolent institutor, is a religion of all others most friendly to liberty, science, and the freest expansion of the human mind.

Thomas Jefferson to Moses Robinson, Washington, March 23, 1801

In some of the delightful conversations with you, in the evenings of 1798-99 & which served as an Anodyne to the afflictions of the crisis through which our country was then laboring, the Christian religion was sometimes our topic: and I then promised you that one day or other, I would give you my views of it. They are the result of a life of inquiry & reflection, & very different from that Anti-Christian system imputed to me by those who know nothing of my opinions. To the corruptions of Christianity, I am indeed opposed; but not to the genuine precepts of Jesus himself. I am a Christian in the only sense in which he wished any one to be; sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others; ascribing to himself every human excellence; & believing he never claimed any other.

Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, Washington, April 21, 1803

But a short time elapsed after the death of the great reformer of the Jewish religion before his principles were departed from by those who professed to be his special servants, & perverted into an engine for enslaving mankind, and aggrandizing their oppressors in church & state: that the purest system of morals ever before preached to man has been adulterated & sophisticated by artificial constructions, into a mere contrivance to filch wealth & power to themselves, that rational men not being able to swallow their impious heresies, in order to force them down their throats, they raise the hue & cry of infidelity, while themselves are the greatest obstacles to the advancement of the real doctrines of Jesus, and do in fact constitute the real Anti-Christ.

Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, Monticello, January 19, 1810

I am a real Christian; that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus.

Thomas Jefferson to Charles Thomson, Monticello, January 9, 1816

Had the doctrines of Jesus been preached always as purely as they came from his lips, the whole civilized world would now have been Christian.

Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Waterhouse, Monticello, June 26, 1822

The Creation

[In speaking of writers on the Creation] They all suppose the earth a created existence. They must suppose a creator then; and that he possessed power and wisdom to a great degree. As he intended the earth for the habitation of animals and vegetables is it reasonable to suppose he made two jobs of his creation? That he first made a chaotic lump and set it into rotary motion, and then waiting the millions of ages necessary to form itself, that when it had done this he stepped in a second time to create the animals and plants which were to inhabit it? As the hand of a creator is to be called in, it may as well be called in at one stage of the process as another. We may as well suppose he created the earth at once nearly in the state in which we see it, fit for the preservation of the beings he placed on it.

Thomas Jefferson to Charles Thomson, Paris, December 17, 1786

The movements of the heavenly bodies, so exactly held in their course by the balance of centrifugal and centripetal forces, the structure of our earth itself, with its distribution of lands, waters and atmosphere, animal and vegetable bodies, examined in all their minutest particles, insects mere atoms of life, yet as perfectly organized as man or mammoth, the mineral substances, their generation and uses, it is impossible, I say, for the human mind not to believe that there is, in all this, design, cause, and effect, up to an ultimate cause, a fabricator of all things from matter and motion, their preserver and regulator while permitted to exist in their present forms, and their regenerator into new and other forms.

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Monticello, April 11, 1823

The dreams about the modes of creation, enquiries whether our globe has been formed by the agency of fire or water, how many millions of years it has cost Vulcan or Neptune to produce what the fiat of the Creator would effect by a single act of will, is too idle to be worth a single hour of any man's life.

Thomas Jefferson to John P. Emmet, Monticello, May 2, 1826

End of the World

I hope you will have good sense enough to disregard those foolish predictions that the world is to be at an end soon. The almighty has never made known to any body at what time he created it, nor will he tell any body when he means to put an end to it, if ever he means to do it. As to preparations for that event, the best way is for you to be always prepared for it.

Thomas Jefferson to Martha Jefferson, Annapolis, December 11, 1783

Freedom of Religion

Section I. Well aware that the opinions and belief of men depend not on their own will, but follow involuntarily the evidence proposed to their minds; that Almighty God hath created the mind free, and manifested his supreme will that free it shall remain by making it altogether insusceptible of restraint; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments, or burdens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, who being lord both of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was in his Almighty power to do, but to extend it by its influence on reason alone; that the impious presumption of legislators and rulers, civil as well as ecclesiastical, who, being themselves but fallible and uninspired men, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions and modes of thinking as the only true and infallible, and as such endeavoring to impose them on others, hath established and maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world and through all time: That to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, 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; and is withdrawing from the ministry those temporary rewards, which proceeding from an approbation of their personal conduct, are an additional incitement to earnest and unremitting labors for the instruction of mankind; that our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions, any more than our opinions in physics or geometry; that therefore the proscribing any citizen as unworthy the public confidence by laying upon him an incapacity of being called to offices of trust and emolument, unless he profess or renounce this or that religious opinion, is depriving him injuriously of those privileges and advantages to which, in common with his fellow citizens, he has a natural right; that it tends also to corrupt the principles of that very religion it is meant to encourage, by bribing, with a monopoly of worldly honors and emoluments, those who will externally profess and conform to it; that though indeed these are criminal who do not withstand such temptation, yet neither are those innocent who lay the bait in their way; that the opinions of men are not the object of civil government, nor under its jurisdiction; that to suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles on supposition of their ill tendency is a dangerous fallacy, which at once destroys all religious liberty, because he being of course judge of that tendency will make his opinions the rule of judgment, and approve or condemn the sentiments of others only as they shall square with or differ from his own; that it is time enough for the rightful purposes of civil government for its officers to interfere when principles break out into overt acts against peace and good order; and finally, that truth is great and will prevail if left to herself; that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate; errors ceasing to be dangerous when it is permitted freely to contradict them.

Sect. II. We the General Assembly of Virginia do enact that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burdened 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, A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom, January 19, 1786

God

I think you give a just outline of the theism of the three religions when you say that the principle of the Hebrew was the fear, of the Gentile the honor, & of the Christian the love of God.

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Monticello, October 12, 1813

We are not in a world ungoverned by the laws and the power of a superior agent. Our efforts are in his hands, and directed by it; and he will give them their effect in his own time.

Thomas Jefferson to David Barrow, Monticello, May 1, 1815

God's Will

It is not easy to reconcile ourselves to the many useless miseries to which Providence seems to expose us. But his justice affords a prospect that we shall all be made even some day.

Thomas Jefferson to Eliza House Trist, Annapolis, December 11, 1783

But whatever is to be our destiny, wisdom, as well as duty, dictates that we should acquiesce in the will of him whose it is to give and to take away, and be contented in the enjoyment of those who are still permitted to be with us.

Thomas Jefferson to John Page, Washington, June 25, 1804

I shall obey it [God's revelation] with the same fidelity with which I would obey his known will in all cases. Hitherto I have been under the guidance of that portion of reason which he has thought proper to deal out to me. I have followed it faithfully in all important cases, to such a degree at least as leaves me without uneasiness; and if on minor occasions I have erred from its dictates, I have trust in him who made us what we are, and

knows it was not his plan to make us always unerring. He has formed us moral agents. Not that, in the perfection of his state, he can feel pain or pleasure in any thing we may do: he is far above our power: but that we may promote the happiness of those with whom he has placed us in society, by acting honestly towards all, benevolently to those who fall within our way, respecting sacredly their rights, bodily and mental, and cherishing especially their freedom of conscience, as we value our own.

Thomas Jefferson to Miles King, Monticello, September 26, 1814

Heaven

An eloquent preacher of your religious society, Richard Motte, in a discourse of much emotion and pathos, is said to have exclaimed aloud to his congregation that he did not believe there was a Quaker, Presbyterian, Methodist or Baptist in heaven, having paused to give his audience time to stare and to wonder; he added, that, in heaven, God knew no distinctions, but considered all good men as his children and as brethren of the same family. I believe, with the Quaker preacher, that he who steadily observes those moral precepts in which all religions concur, will never be questioned, at the gates of heaven, as to the dogmas in which they all differ. That on entering there, all these are left behind us. . . . Of all the systems of morality, ancient or modern, which have come under my observation, none appear to me so pure as that of Jesus. He who follows this steadily need not, I think, be uneasy.

Thomas Jefferson to William Canby, Monticello, September 18, 1813

The Hereafter

It is not for me to pronounce on the hypothesis you present of a transmigration of souls from one body to another in certain cases. The laws of nature have withheld from us the means of physical knowledge of the country of spirits and revelation has, for reasons unknown to us, chosen to leave us in the dark as we were. When I was young I was fond of the speculations which seemed to promise some insight into that hidden country, but observing at length that they left me in the same ignorance in which they had found me, I have for very many years ceased to read or to think concerning them, and have reposed my head on that pillow of ignorance which a benevolent creator has made so soft for us,

knowing how much we should be forced to use it. I have thought it better, by nourishing the good passions, & controlling the bad, to merit an inheritance in a state of being of which I can know so little, and to trust for the future to him who has been so good for the past.

Thomas Jefferson to Isaac Story, Washington, December 5, 1801

Jesus

In extracting the pure principles which he taught, we should have to strip off the artificial vestments in which they have been muffled by priests, who have travestied them into various forms, as instruments of riches and power to them. . . . There will be found remaining the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man. I have performed this operation for my own use, by cutting, verse by verse, out of the printed book, and arranging, the matter which is evidently his, and which is as easily distinguishable as diamonds in a dunghill. The result is . . . 46 pages of pure and unsophisticated doctrines, such as were professed & acted on by the *unlettered* apostles, the Apostolic fathers, and the Christians of the 1st century.

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Monticello, October 12, 1813

In the New testament there is internal evidence that parts of it have proceeded from an extraordinary man; and that other parts are of the fabric of very inferior minds. It is as easy to separate those parts, as to pick out diamonds from dunghills. The matter of the first was such as would be preserved in the memory of the hearers, and handed on by tradition for a long time; the latter such stuff as might be gathered up, imbedding it, any where, and at any time.

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Monticello, January 24, 1814

The doctrines which flowed from the lips of Jesus himself are within the comprehension of a child.

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, July 5, 1814

I too have made a wee little book from the same materials, which I call the Philosophy of Jesus. It is a paradigma of his doctrines, made by cutting the texts out of the book and arranging them on the pages of a blank book in a certain order of time or subject. A more beautiful or precious morsel of ethics I have never seen. It is a document in proof that *I am a real Christian*, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus.

Thomas Jefferson to Charles Thomson, January 6, 1816

I hold the precepts of Jesus, as delivered by himself, to be the most pure, benevolent, and sublime which have ever been preached to man. I adhere to the principles of the first age; and consider all subsequent innovations as corruptions of his religion, having no foundation in what came from him.

Thomas Jefferson to Jared Sparks, Monticello, November 4, 1820

No one sees with greater pleasure than myself the progress of reason in its advances towards rational Christianity. When we shall have done away the incomprehensible jargon of the Trinitarian arithmetic, that three are one, and one is three; when we shall have knocked down the artificial scaffolding, reared to mask from view the simple structure of Jesus; when, in short, we shall have unlearned every thing which has been taught since his day, and got back to the pure and simple doctrines he inculcated, we shall then be truly and worthily his disciples: and my opinion is that if nothing had ever been added to what flowed purely from his lips, the whole world would at this day have been Christian.

Thomas Jefferson to Timothy Pickering, Monticello, February 27, 1821

The doctrines of Jesus are simple, and tend all to the happiness of man.

1. That there is one only God, & he all perfect.
2. That there is a future state of rewards & punishments.
3. That to love God with all thy heart & thy neighbor as thyself, is the sum of religion. These are the great points on which he endeavored to reform the religion of the Jews.

Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Waterhouse, Monticello, June 26, 1822

Missionaries

These incendiaries, finding that the days of fire and faggot are over in the Atlantic hemisphere, are now preparing to put the torch to the Asiatic regions. What would they say were the Pope to send annually to this country colonies of Jesuit priests with cargoes of their Missal and translations of their Vulgate, to be put gratis into the hands of every one who would accept them? *and to act thus nationally on us as a nation?*

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Poplar Forest, November 25, 1816

I think with them on many points, and especially on missionary and Bible societies. While we have so many around us, within the same social pale, who need instruction and assistance, why carry to a distance, and to strangers what our own neighbors need? It is a duty certainly to give our sparings to those who want: but to see also that they are faithfully distributed, & duly apportioned to the respective wants of those receivers. And why give thro' agents whom we know not, to persons whom we know not, and in countries from which we get no account, when we can do it at short hand, to objects under our eye, thro' agents we know, and to supply wants we see? I do not know that it is a duty to disturb by missionaries the religion and peace of other countries, who may think themselves bound to extinguish by fire and fagot the heresies to which we give the name of conversions, and quote our own example for it. Were the Pope, or his Holy allies to send in mission to us some thousands of Jesuit priests to convert us to their Orthodoxy, I suspect that we should deem and treat it as a National aggression on our peace and faith.

Thomas Jefferson to Michael Megear, Monticello, May 29, 1823

Quakers

It seems to be well understood, that their attachment to England is stronger than to their principles or their country.

Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, Philadelphia, March 29, 1798

You expect that your book will have some effect on the prejudices which the society of friends entertain against the present & late administrations. In this I think you

will be disappointed. The Friends are men, formed with the same passions, & swayed by the same natural principles & prejudices as others. In cases where the passions are neutral, men will display their respect for the religious *professions* of their sect. But where their passions are enlisted, these *professions* are no obstacle. You observe very truly that both the late & present administration conducted the government on principles *professed* by the Friends. Our efforts to preserve peace, our measures as to the Indians, as to slavery, as to religious freedom, were all in consonance with their *professions*. Yet I never expected we should get a vote from them, & in this I was neither deceived nor disappointed. There is no riddle in this to those who do not suffer themselves to be duped by the *professions* of religious sectarians. The theory of American Quakerism is a very obvious one. The Mother society is in England. Its members are English by birth & residence, devoted to their own country as good citizens ought to be. The Quakers of these states are colonies or filiations from the mother society, to whom that society sends its yearly lessons. On these, the filiated societies model their opinions, their conduct, their passions & attachments. A Quaker is essentially an Englishman, in whatever part of the earth he is born or lives.

Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, Monticello, January 19, 1810

Religious Intolerance

Your sect by its sufferings has furnished a remarkable proof of the universal spirit of religious intolerance, inherent in every sect, disclaimed by all while feeble and practiced by all when in power. Our laws have applied the only antidote to this vice, protecting our religions, as they do our civil rights by putting them all on an equal footing. But more remains to be done, for altho' we are free by the law, we are not so in practice.

Thomas Jefferson to Mordecai Manuel Noah, May 28, 1818

Religious Tolerance

Our rulers can have authority over such natural rights only as we have submitted to them. The rights of conscience we never submitted, we could never submit. We are answerable for them to our God. The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg. If it be said, his

testimony in a court of Justice cannot be relied on; reject it then and be the stigma on him. Constraint may make him worse by making him a hypocrite, but it will never make him a truer man. It may fix him obstinately in his errors, but will not cure them. Reason and free enquiry are the only effectual agents against error.

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1781-1785

Separation of Church and State

In matters of religion, I have considered that its free exercise is placed by the constitution independent of the powers of the general government. I have therefore undertaken, on no occasion, to prescribe the religious exercises suited to it; but have left them, as the constitution found them, under the direction and discipline of State or Church authorities acknowledged by the several religious societies.

Thomas Jefferson, Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1805

Proclamations of Thanksgiving

I consider the government of the U.S. as interdicted by the constitution from intermeddling with religious institutions, their doctrines, discipline, or exercises. This results not only from the provision that no law shall be made respecting the establishment, or free exercise of religion, but from that also which reserves to the states the powers not delegated to the U.S. Certainly no power to prescribe any religious exercise, or to assume authority in religious discipline, has been delegated to the general government. It must then rest with the states, as far as it can be in any human authority.

But it is only proposed that I should *recommend*, not prescribe a day of fasting & prayer. That is, that I should *indirectly* assume to the U.S. an authority over religious exercises which the constitution has directly precluded them from. . . . I do not believe it is for the interest of religion to invite the civil magistrate to direct its exercises, its discipline or its doctrine: nor of the religious societies that the general government should be invested with the power of effecting uniformity of time or matter among them. Fasting & prayer are religious exercises, & the objects proper for them,

according to their own particular tenets: and this right can never be safer than in their own hands, where the constitution has deposited it.

Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Miller, January 23, 1808

The Soul

It requires one effort only to admit the single incomprehensibility of matter endowed with thought: and two to believe, 1st. that of an existence called Spirit, of which we have neither evidence nor idea, and then 2dly. how that spirit which has neither extension nor solidity, can put material organs into motion. These are things which you and I may perhaps know ere long.

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Monticello, March 14, 1820

Unitarianism

It is too late in the day for men of sincerity to pretend they believe in the Platonic mysticisms that three are one, and one is three; and yet the one is not three, and the three are not one.

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, Monticello, August 22, 1813

That this will ere long be the religion of the majority from North to South, I have no doubt.

Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, Monticello, November 2, 1822

Thomas Jefferson's "Wall of Separation" Letter, 1802

The address of the Danbury Baptist Association in the State of Connecticut assembled October 7, 1801 to Thomas Jefferson, Esq., President of the United States of America.

Sir:

Among the many millions in America and Europe who rejoice in your Election to office, we embrace the first opportunity which we have enjoyed in our collective capacity since your inauguration, to express our great satisfaction in your appointment to the chief Magistracy in the United States: And though our mode of expression may be less costly and pompous than what many others clothe their addresses with, we beg you, Sir to believe, that none are more sincere.

Our Sentiments are uniformly on the side of Religious Liberty - That religion is at all times and places a matter between God and Individuals - That no man ought to suffer in Name, person or effects on account of his religious Opinions - That the legitimate Power of Civil Government extends no further than to punish the man who works ill to his neighbor. But, Sir our constitution of government is not specific. Our infant charter, together with the Laws made coincident therewith, were adopted as the Basis of our government at the time of our revolution; and such had been our Laws and usages, and such still are; that religion is considered as the first object of Legislation; and therefore what religious privileges we enjoy (as a minor part of the State) we enjoy as favor granted, and not as inalienable rights: And these favors we receive at the expense of such degrading acknowledgements, as are inconsistent with the rights of freemen. It is not to be wondered at therefore; if those, who seek after power and gain under the pretence of government and Religion should reproach their fellow man - should Reproach their Chief Magistrate, as an enemy of Religion, Law and good order because he will not, dare not assume the prerogative of Jehovah and make Laws to govern the kingdom of Christ.

Sir, we are sensible that the President of the United States, is not the national Legislator and also sensible that the national government cannot destroy the Laws of each state; but our hopes are strong that the sentiments of our beloved President, which have had such genial Effect already, like the radiant beams of the Sun, will shine and prevail through all these States and all the world till Hierarchy and tyranny be destroyed from the Earth.

Sir, when we reflect on your past services, and see a glow of philanthropy and good will shining forth in a cause of more than thirty years we have reason to believe that America's God has raised you up to fill the chair of State out of that good will which he bears to the

Millions which you preside over. May God Strengthen you for the arduous task which providence and the voice of the people have called you to sustain, and support you in your Administration against all the predetermined opposition of those who wish to rise to wealth and importance on the poverty and subjection of the people.

And may the Lord preserve you safe from every evil and bring you at last to his Heavenly kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Glorious Mediator.

Signed in behalf of the Association,

The Committee: :Neh. Dodge , Ephraim Robbins, Stephen S. Nelson

Jefferson's Response, January 1. 1802

To messers Nehemiah Dodge, Ephraim Robbins, & Stephen S. Nelson, a committee of the Danbury Baptist association in the state of Connecticut.

Gentlemen

The affectionate sentiments of esteem & approbation which you are so good as to express towards me, on behalf of the Danbury Baptist association, give me the highest satisfaction. my duties dictate a faithful & zealous pursuit of the interests of my constituents, and, in proportion as they are persuaded of my fidelity to those duties, the discharge of them becomes more & more pleasing.

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 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 eternal separation between Church & State. Congress thus inhibited from acts respecting religion, and the Executive authorised only to execute their acts, I have refrained from prescribing even those occasional performances of devotion, practiced indeed by the Executive

of another nation as the legal head of its church, but subject here, as religious exercises only to the voluntary regulations and discipline of each respective sect,

[Jefferson first wrote: "*confining myself therefore to the duties of my station, which are merely temporal, be assured that your religious rights shall never be infringed by any act of mine and that.*" These lines he crossed out and then wrote: "*concurring with*"; having crossed out these two words, he wrote: "*Adhering to this great act of national legislation in behalf of the rights of conscience*"; next he crossed out these words and wrote: "*Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience I shall see with friendly dispositions the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced that he has no natural rights in opposition to his social duties.*"]

I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection & blessing of the common father and creator of man, and tender you for yourselves & the Danbury Baptist [your religious] association assurances of my high respect & esteem.

JAMES MADISON

This belief in a God All Powerful wise and good, is so essential to the mortal order of the world and to the happiness of man, that arguments which enforce it cannot be drawn from too many sources nor adapted with too much solicitude to the different characters and capacities to be impressed with it. . . . The finiteness of the Human understanding betrays itself on all subjects, but more especially when it contemplates such as involve infinity. What may safely be said seems to be, that the infinity of time and space forces itself on our conception, a limitation of either being inconceivable: that the mind prefers at once the idea of a self existing cause to that of an infinite series of cause and effect, which arguments, instead of avoiding the difficulty: and that it finds more facility in assenting to the self existence of an invisible cause possessing infinite power, wisdom and goodness, than to the self existence of the universe, visibly destitute of those attributes, and which may be the effect of them.

*from
Paine*

James Madison to Frederick Beasley, November 29, 1825

The best & purest religion, the Christian Religion itself.

James Madison to Jasper Adams, September 1833

There appears to be in the nature of man, what ensures his belief in an invisible cause of his present existence, & an anticipation of his future existence. Hence the propensities & susceptibilities, in the case of religion, which, with a few doubtful or individual exceptions, have prevailed throughout the world.

James Madison to Jasper Adams, September 1833

Separation of Church and State

There remains in others [American states] a strong bias towards the old error, that without some sort of alliance or coalition between Govt. & religion neither can be duly supported. Such indeed is the tendency to such a coalition, and such is the corrupting influence on both parties, that the danger cannot be too carefully guarded against. . . . Every new & successful example therefore of a perfect separation between ecclesiastical and civil matters, is of importance. And I have no doubt that every new example, will succeed, as every past one

has done, in shewing that religion & Govt. will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together. . . . I cannot speak particularly of any of the cases excepting that of Virginia where it is impossible to deny that Religion prevails with more zeal, and a more exemplary priesthood than it ever did when established and patronised by Public authority. We are teaching the world the great truth that Govts. do better without Kings & Nobles than with them. The merit will be doubled by the other lesson that Religion flourishes in greater purity, without than with the aid of Govt.

James Madison to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822

God Helps America

It is impossible for the man of pious reflection not to perceive in it [the drafting of the Constitution], a finger of that Almighty hand which has been so frequently and signally extended to our relief in the critical stages of the revolution.

James Madison, *The Federalist* No. 37, *New York Daily Advertiser*, January 11, 1788

Chaplains

Is the appointment of Chaplains to the two Houses of Congress consistent with the Constitution, and with the pure principles of religious freedom?

In strictness the answer on both points must be in the negative. The Constitution of the U.S. forbids everything like an establishment of a national religion. The law appointing Chaplains establishes a religious worship for the national representatives, to be performed by Ministers of religion, elected by a majority of them; and these are to be paid out of national taxes. Does not this involve the principle of a national establishment, applicable to a provision for a religious worship for the Constitution as well as of the representative Body, approved by the majority, and conducted by Ministers of religion paid by the entire nation.

The establishment of the chaplainship to Congress is a palpable violation of equal rights, as well as of Constitutional principles: the tenets of the chaplains elected shut the door of worship against the members whose creeds & consciences forbid a participation in that of the majority. To say nothing of others sects, this is the case with that of Roman Catholics & Quakers who have always had members in one or both of the Legislative branches. Could a Catholic clergyman ever hope to be appointed a Chaplain? To say that his religious principles

are obnoxious or that his sect is small, is to list the evil at once and exhibit in its naked deformity the doctrine that religious truth is to be tested by numbers, or that the major sects have a right to govern the minor.

If Religion consist in voluntary acts of individuals, singly, or voluntarily associated, and it be proper that public functionaries, as well as their Constituents should discharge their religious duties, let them like their Constituents, do so at their own expense. How small a contribution from each member of Congress would suffice for the purpose? How just would it be in its principle? How noble in its exemplary sacrifice to the genius of the Constitution; and the divine right of conscience. . . .

Better also to disarm in the same way, the precedent of Chaplainships for the army and navy than erect them into a political authority in matters of religion. The object of this establishment is seducing; the motive to it is laudable. But is it not safer to adhere to a right principle, and trust to its consequences, than confide in the reasoning however specious in favor of a wrong one.

James Madison, Detached memorandum, 1819

Thanksgiving Proclamations

Religious proclamations by the Executive recommending thanksgiving & fasts . . . altho' recommendations only, they imply a religious agency, making no part of the trust delegated to political rulers. . . . The last & not the least objection is the liability of the practice to a subserviency to political views; to the scandal of religion, as well as the increase of party animosities. Candid or incautious politicians will not always disown such views. In truth it is difficult to frame such a religious Proclamation generally suggested by a political State of things, without referring to them in terms having some bearing on party questions.

James Madison, Detached Memorandum, 1819

THOMAS PAINE

America as a Religious Asylum

The time . . . at which the continent was discovered, adds weight to the argument [for independence from Great Britain], and the manner in which it was peopled increases the force of it. The reformation was preceded by the discovery of America, as if the Almighty graciously meant to open a sanctuary to the persecuted in future years, when home should afford neither friendship nor safety.

Common Sense, 1776

The Bible

When we contemplate the immensity of that Being, who directs and governs the incomprehensible WHOLE, of which the utmost ken of human sight can discover but a part, we ought to feel shame at calling such paltry stories the word of God.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

When I see throughout the greatest part of this book, scarcely any thing but a history of the grossest vices, and a collection of the most paltry and contemptible tales, I cannot dishonor my Creator by calling it by his name.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

People in general know not what wickedness there is in this pretended word of God. Brought up in habits of superstition, they take it for granted, that the bible is true, and that it is good. They permit themselves not to doubt of it; and they carry the ideas they form of the benevolence of the Almighty to the book which they have been taught to believe was written by his authority. Good heavens, it is quite another thing! It is a book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy; for what can be greater blasphemy than to ascribe the wickedness of man to the orders of the Almighty.

Age of Reason, II, 1795

Christianity

The church has set up a system of religion very contradictory to the character of the person whose name it bears. It has set up a religion of pomp and of revenue in pretended imitation of a person whose life was humility and poverty.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

As to the christian system of faith, it appears to me as a species of atheism; a sort of religious denial of God. It professes to believe in a man rather than in God. It is a compound made up chiefly of manism with but little deism. It introduces between man and his maker an opaque body which it calls a redeemer; as the moon introduces her opaque self between the earth and the sun, and it produces by this means a religious or an irreligious eclipse of light. It has put the whole orb of reason into shade.

The effect of this obscurity has been that of turning every thing upside down, and representing it in reverse; and among the revolutions it has thus magically produced, it has made a revolution in Theology.

That which is now called natural philosophy, embracing the whole circle of science, of which astronomy occupies the chief place, is the study of the works of God and of the power and wisdom of God in his works, and is the true theology.

As to the theology that is now studied in its place, it is the study of human opinions and of human fancies *concerning* God. It is not the study of God himself in the works that he has made, but in the works or writings that man has made; and it is not among the least of the mischiefs that the christian system has done to the world, that it has abandoned the original and beautiful system of theology, like a beautiful innocent to distress and reproach, to make room for the hag of superstition.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

The Creation

Every nation of people has been world-makers [i.e., developers of a theory of the Creation].

Age of Reason, I, 1794

It is only in the CREATION that all our ideas and conceptions of a *word of God* can unite.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

The creation is the bible of the deist. He there reads, in the hand writing of the Creator himself, the certainty of his existence, and the immutability of his power; and all other bibles and testaments are to him forgeries.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

It is necessary that we refer to the bible of the creation. The principles we discover there are eternal and of divine origin. They are the foundation of all the science that exists in the world, and must be the foundation of theology.

Age of Reason, II, 1795

Do we want to know what GOD is? Search not written or printed books, but the Scripture called the *creation*.

A Discourse at the Society of Theophilanthropists, 1797;

Thomas Paine to Samuel Adams, Washington, January 1, 1803;

Age of Reason, I, 1794 (slight variation)

Creed

I am neither farmer, manufacturer, mechanic, merchant nor shopkeeper. I believe, however, I am of the first class. I am a *Farmer of thoughts*.

Letter to Henry Laurens, 1778

I have ever kept a clear head and an upright heart, and am not afraid of being replied to. I never took up a matter without fully believing it to be right, and never yet failed in proving it so.

Philadelphia *Freeman's Journal*, May 1, 1782

It was the cause of America that made me an author.

"The Crisis," 1783

Independence is my happiness, and I view things as they are, without regard to place or person; my country is the world, and my religion is to do good.

Rights of Man, II, 1792

I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

My own mind is my own church.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

... the first article of every man's creed, and of every nation's creed, that has any creed at all. *I believe in God.*

Thomas Paine to Samuel Adams, Washington, January 1, 1803

I have lived an honest and useful life to mankind; my time has been spent in doing good, and I die in perfect composure and resignation to the will of my Creator, God.

The Last Will and Testament of Thomas Paine, January 18, 1809

Deism

The true deist has but one Deity; and his religion consists in contemplating the power, wisdom, and benignity of the Deity in his works, and in endeavoring to imitate him in every thing moral, scientific, and mechanical.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

It is a duty incumbent on every true deist, that he vindicates the moral justice of God against the calumnies of the bible.

Age of Reason, II, 1795

Is it not more safe that we stop ourselves at the plain, pure, and unmixed belief of one God, which is Deism, than that we commit ourselves on an ocean of improbable, irrational, indecent and contradictory tales [i.e., the Bible]?

Age of Reason, II, 1795

The only religion that has not been invented, and that has in it every evidence of divine originality, is pure and simple deism.

Age of Reason, II, 1795

God

Man is ever a stranger to the ways by which Providence regulates the order of things.

Letter to the People of France, 1792

The only idea man can affix to the name of God, is, that of a *first cause*, the cause of all things. And incomprehensibly difficult as it is for man to conceive what a first cause is, he arrives at the belief of it, from the tenfold greater difficulty of disbelieving it. It is difficult beyond description to conceive that space can have no end; but it is more difficult to conceive an

end. It is difficult beyond the power of man to conceive an eternal duration of what we call time; but it is more impossible to conceive a time when there shall be no time. In like manner of reasoning, every thing we behold carries in itself the internal evidence that it did not make itself . . . ; and it is the conviction arising from this evidence, that carries us on, as it were, by necessity, to the belief of a first cause eternally existing, of a nature totally different to any material existence we know of, and by the power of which all things exist, and this first cause man calls God.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

First, canst thou by *searching* find out God? Yes. Because, in the first place, I know I did not make myself, and yet I have existence; and by *searching* into the nature of other things, I find that no other thing could make itself; and yet millions of other things exist; therefore it is, that I know, by positive conclusion resulting from this search, that there is a power superior to all those things, and that power is God.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

Our ideas, not only of the Almightyness of the Creator, but of his wisdom and his beneficence, become enlarged in proportion as we contemplate the extent and the structure of the universe.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

It is only by the exercise of reason, that man can discover God.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

To the Almighty all things are possible.

Age of Reason, II, 1795

The Almighty is the great mechanic of the creation; the first philosopher and the original teacher of all science.

Age of Reason, II, 1795

The notion of a trinity of gods has enfeebled the belief of *one* God.

Age of Reason, II, 1795

We can know God only through his works.

Age of Reason, II, 1795

The creator of man is the creator science, and it is through that medium that man can see God, as it were, face to face.

Age of Reason, II, 1795

Do we want to contemplate His power? We see it in the immensity of the Creation. Do we want to contemplate His wisdom? We see it in the unchangeable order by which the incomprehensible WHOLE is governed. Do we want to contemplate His munificence? We see it in the abundance with which He fills the earth. Do we want to contemplate His mercy? We see it in His not withholding that abundance even from the unthankful. In fine, do we want to know what GOD is? Search not written or printed books, but the Scripture called the *creation*.

A Discourse at the Society of Theophilanthropists, 1797;

Thomas Paine to Samuel Adams, Washington, January 1, 1803;

Age of Reason, I, 1794 (slight variation)

Let us examine this subject; it is worth examining; for if we examine it through all its cases, the result will be that the existence of a SUPERIOR CAUSE, or that which man calls GOD, will be discoverable by philosophical principles.

A Discourse at the Society of Theophilanthropists, 1797

Hell

If we believe the power of hell to be limited, we must likewise believe that their agents are under some providential control.

“The American Crisis,” 1776

The Hereafter

I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

I trouble not myself about the manner of future existence. I content myself with believing, even to positive conviction, that the power that gave me existence is able to continue it, in any form and manner he pleases, either with or without this body; and it appears more probable to me that I shall continue to exist hereafter, than that I should have had existence, as I now have, before that existence began.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

The probability that we *may be* called to account hereafter, will, to reflecting minds, have the influence of belief; for it is not our belief or our disbelief, that can make or unmake the fact. As this is the state we are in, and which it is proper we should be in as free agents, it is the fool only, and not the philosopher, nor even the prudent man, that will live as if there were no God.

Age of Reason, II, 1795

As a matter of choice, as well as of hope, I had rather have a better body and a more convenient form, than the present.

Age of Reason, II, 1795

But all other arguments apart, the *consciousness of existence* is the only conceivable idea we can have of another life, and the continuance of that consciousness is immortality. The consciousness of existence, or of knowing that we exist, is not necessarily confined to the same form, nor to the same matter, even in this life. We have not in all cases the same form, nor in any case the same matter, that composed our bodies twenty or thirty years ago, and yet we are conscious of being the same persons. Even legs and arms, which make up almost half the human frame, are not necessary to the consciousness of existence. These may be lost or taken away, and the full consciousness of existence remain, and were their place supplied by wings, or other appendages, we cannot conceive that it could alter our consciousness of existence. In short, we know not how much, or rather how little, of our composition it is, and how exquisitely fine that little is, that creates in us this consciousness of existence, and all beyond that is like the pulp of a peach, distinct and separate from the vegetative speck in the kernel.

Age of Reason, II, 1795

The key to heaven is not in the keeping of any sect, nor ought the road to it to be obstructed by any.

Thomas Paine to Samuel Adams, Washington, January 1, 1803

I consider myself in the hands of my Creator, and that He will dispose of me after this life consistently with His justice and goodness. I leave all these matters to Him, as my Creator and friend, and I hold it to be presumption in man to make an article of faith as to what the Creator will do with us hereafter. I do not believe because a man and a woman make a child that it imposes on the Creator the unavoidable obligation of keeping the being so made in eternal existence hereafter. It is in His power to do so, or not to do so, and it is not in our power to decide which He will do.

Examination of the Prophecies, 1807

My own opinion is, that those whose lives have been spent in doing good, and endeavoring to make their fellow-mortals happy, for this is the only way in which we can serve God, will be happy hereafter; and that the very wicked will meet with some punishment. But those who are neither good nor bad, or are too insignificant for notice, will be dropped entirely.

Examination of the Prophecies, 1807

Jesus

He was a virtuous and an amiable man. The morality that he preached and practiced was of the most benevolent kind.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

He was a Jew by birth and by profession; and he was the son of God in like manner that every other person is; for the Creator is the Father of All.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

Jesus Christ founded no new system. He called men to the practice of moral virtues, and the belief of one God. The great trait in his character is philanthropy.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

Prayer

A man does not serve God when he prays, for it is himself he is trying to serve . . . but instead of buffeting the Deity with prayers as if I distrusted him or must dictate to him, I reposed myself on his protection; and you, my friend, will find, even in your last moments, more consolation in the silence of resignation than in the murmuring wish of prayer.

Thomas Paine to Samuel Adams, Washington, January 1, 1803

Predestination

The absurd and impious doctrine of predestination, a doctrine destructive of morals, would never have been thought of had it not been for some stupid passages in the Bible, which priestcraft at first, and ignorance since, have imposed upon mankind as revelation.

Predestination, 1809

Quakers

The principles of Quakerism have a direct tendency to make a man the quiet and inoffensive subject of any, and every government *which is set over him*.

Common Sense, 1776

What more can we say of ye than that a religious Quaker is a valuable character, and a political Quaker a real Jesuit.

"The American Crisis," 1777

The religion that approaches the nearest of all others to true deism, in the moral and benign part thereof, is that professed by the quakers, but they have contracted themselves too much by leaving the works of God out of their system. Though I reverence their philanthropy, I cannot help smiling at the conceit, that if the taste of a quaker could have been consulted at the creation, what a silent and drab-colored creation it would have been! Not a flower would have blossomed its gaities, nor a bird been permitted to sing.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

The only sect that has not persecuted, are the Quakers, and the only reason that can be given for it is, that they are rather Deists than Christians. They do not believe much about Jesus Christ, and they call the scriptures a dead letter.

Age of Reason, II, 1795

Religion

To God, and not to man, are all men accountable on the score of religion.

Common Sense, 1776; Epistle to Quakers, 1776

Every religion is good, that teaches man to be good.

Rights of Man, II, 1792

Religion is very improperly made a political machine.

Rights of Man, II, 1792

Religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow creatures happy.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

Man does not learn religion as he learns the secrets and mysteries of a trade. He learns the theory of religion by reflection. It arises out of the action of his own mind upon the things which he sees, or upon what he may happen to hear or to read, and the practice joins itself thereto.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

The only true religion is deism, by which I . . . mean the belief of one God, and an imitation of his moral character, or the practice of what are called moral virtues.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

The creation is the bible of the deist. He there reads, in the hand writing of the Creator himself, the certainty of his existence, and the

immutability of his power; and all other bibles and testaments are to him forgeries.

Age of Reason, II, 1795

Religion has two principal enemies, fanaticism and infidelity, or that which is called atheism. The first requires to be combated by reason and morality, the other by natural philosophy.

A Discourse at the Society of Theophilanthropists, 1797

The universe is the bible of a true Theophilanthropist. It is there that he reads God. It is there that the proofs of His existence are to be sought and to be found. . . . the universe [is] the true Bible—the inimitable work of God.

A Discourse at the Society of Theophilanthropists, 1797

The modes of worship are as various as the sects are numerous; and amidst all this variety and multiplicity there is but one article of belief in which every religion in the world agrees. That article has universal sanction. It is the belief of a God, or what the Greeks described by the word *Theism*, and the Latins by that of *Deism*.

A Letter to Camille Jordan, 1797

The intellectual part of religion is a private affair between every man and his Maker, and in which no third party has any right to interfere. The practical part consists in our doing good to each other.

A Letter to Camille Jordan, 1797

Religion does not unite itself to show and noise. True religion is without either. Where there is both there is no true religion.

A Letter to Camille Jordan, 1797

Practical religion consists in doing good; and the only way of serving God is, that of endeavoring to make his creation happy. All preaching that has not this for its object is nonsense and hypocrisy.

Agrarian Justice, 1797

The key to heaven is not in the keeping of any sect, nor ought the road to it to be obstructed by any. Our relation to each other in this world is as men, and the man who is a friend to man and to his rights, let his religious opinions be what they may, is a good citizen.

Thomas Paine to Samuel Adams, Washington, January 1, 1803

Religious Diversity

It is the will of the Almighty, that there should be diversity of religious opinions among us: It affords a larger field for our Christian kindness. Were we all of one way of thinking, our religious dispositions would want matter for probation; and on this liberal principle, I look on the various denominations among us, to be like children of the same family, differing only, in what is called, their Christian names.

Common Sense , 1776

If we suppose a large family of children, who, on any particular day, or particular circumstance, made it a custom to present to their parent some token of their affection and gratitude, each of them would make a different offering, and most probably in a different manner. Some would pay their congratulations in themes of verse or prose, by some little devices, as their genius dictated, or according to what they thought would please; and, perhaps, the least of all, not able to do any of those things, would ramble into the garden, or the field, and gather what it thought the prettiest flower it could find, though, perhaps, it might be but a simple weed. The parent would be more gratified by such variety, than if the whole of them had acted on a concerted plan, and each had made exactly the same offering. This would

have the cold appearance of contrivance, or the harsh one of controul. But of all unwelcome things, nothing could more afflict the parent than to know, that the whole of them had afterwards gotten together by the ears, boys and girls, fighting, scratching, reviling, and abusing each other about which was the best or the worst present.

Why may we not suppose, that the great Father of all is pleased with variety of devotion; and that the greatest offense we can act, is that by which we seek to torment and render each other miserable.

Rights of Man, II, 1792

I do not believe that any two men, on what are called doctrinal points, think alike who think at all. It is only those who have not thought that appear to agree.

Rights of Man, II, 1792

Adam, if ever there were such a man, was created a Deist; but in the mean time let every man follow, as he has a right to do, the religion and the worship he prefers.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

Religious Establishment

All religions are in their nature mild and benign, and united with principles of morality. They could not have made proselites at first, by professing any thing that was vicious, cruel, persecuting, or immoral. Like every thing else, they had their beginning; and they proceeded by persuasion, exhortation, and example. How then is it that they lose their native mildness, and become morose and intolerant?

It proceeds from the connection which Mr. Burke recommends. By engendering the church with the state, a sort of mule animal, capable only of destroying, and not of breeding up, is produced, called *The Church*

established by Law. It is a stranger, even from its birth, to any parent mother on which it is begotten, and whom in time it kicks out and destroys.

Rights of Man, I, 1791

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

Rights of Man, I, 1791

All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

Every national church or religion has established itself by pretending some special mission from God communicated to certain individuals. The Jews have their Moses; the Christians their Jesus Christ, their apostles, and saints; and the Turks their Mahomet; as if the way to God was not open to every man alike.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

Religious Freedom

Spiritual freedom is the root of political liberty. . . . As the union between spiritual freedom and political liberty seems nearly inseparable, it is our duty to defend both.

Thoughts on Defensive War, 1775

As to religion, I hold it to be the indispensable duty of all government, to protect all conscientious professors thereof, and I know of no other business which government hath to do therewith.

Common Sense, 1776

Of all the tyrannies that afflict mankind, tyranny in religion is the worst. Every other species of tyranny is limited to the world we live in, but this attempts a stride beyond the grave and seeks to pursue us into eternity. It is there and not here, it is to God and not to man, it is to a heavenly and not an earthly tribunal that we are to account for our belief.

A Letter to Mr. Erskine, 1797

Religion is a private affair between every man and his Maker, and no tribunal or third party has a right to interfere between them. It is not properly a thing of this world; it is only practiced in this world; but its object is in a future world; and it is not otherwise an object of just laws than for the purpose of protecting the equal rights of all, however various their belief may be.

A Letter to Mr. Erskine, 1797

Every sectary, except the Quakers, has been a persecutor. Those who fled from persecution persecuted in their turn, and it is this confusion of creeds that has filled the world with persecution and deluged it with blood.

Thomas Paine to Samuel Adams, Washington, January 1, 1803

Scripture

The word of God cannot exist in any written or human language.

The continually progressive change to which the meaning of words is subject, the want of an universal language which renders translations necessary, the errors to which translations are again subject, the mistakes of copyists and printers, together with the possibility of willful alteration, are of themselves evidences, that human language, whether in speech or in print, cannot be the vehicle of the word of God.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

The word of God is the creation we behold. And it is in *this word*, which no human invention can counterfeit or alter, that God speaketh universally to man.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

It is only in the CREATION that all our ideas and conceptions of a *word of God* can unite.

Age of Reason, I, 1794

But though, speaking for myself, I thus admit the possibility of revelation, I totally disbelieve that the Almighty ever did communicate any thing to man by any mode of speech in any language, or by any kind of vision or appearance, or by any means which our senses are capable of receiving; otherwise than by the universal display of himself in the works of the creation, and by that repugnance we feel in ourselves to bad actions, and disposition to good ones.

Age of Reason, II, 1795

Theology

The study of theology in books of opinions has often produced fanaticism, rancor and cruelty of temper; and from hence have proceeded the numerous persecutions, the fanatical quarrels, the religious burnings and massacres, that have desolated Europe.

A Discourse at the Society of Theophilanthropists, 1797

Toleration

Toleration is not the *opposite* of Intoleration, but is the *counterfeit* of it. Both are despotisms. The one assumes to itself the right of withholding Liberty of Conscience, and the other of granting it. The one is the pope, armed with fire and faggot, and the other is the pope selling or granting indulgences. The former is church and state, and the latter is church and traffic.

But Toleration may be viewed in a much stronger light. Man worships not himself, but his Maker; and the liberty of conscience which he claims, is not for the service of himself, but of his God. In this case, therefore, we must necessarily have the associated idea of two beings; the *mortal* who renders the worship, and the IMMORTAL BEING who is worshipped. Toleration, therefore, places itself, not between man and man, nor between church and church, nor between denomination of religion and another, but between God and man; between the being who worships, and the BEING who is worshipped; and by the same act of assumed authority by which it tolerates man to pay his worship, it presumptuously and blasphemously sets itself up to tolerate the Almighty to receive it.

Rights of Man, I, 1791

Zealots

Such men are never good moral evidences of any doctrine they preach. They are always in extremes, as well of action as of belief.

Age of Reason, II, 1795

George Washington

While we are zealously performing the duties of good citizens and soldiers, we certainly ought not to be inattentive to the higher duties of religion.

George Washington: General Orders, Valley Forge, May 2, 1778

Religion and morality are the essential pillars of civil society.

George Washington to the Clergy of Different Denominations, Philadelphia, March 3,
1797

God

When you speak of God or his attributes, let it be seriously and [with] reverence.

George Washington: Rules of Civility (GW Copies), 1745

See the wondrous works of Providence! The uncertainty of human things!

George Washington to Robert Jackson, Mount Vernon, August 2, 1755

God alone is the judge of the hearts of men.

George Washington to Benedict Arnold, Cambridge, Mass., September 14, 1775

The Will of God

The determinations of Providence are always wise, often inscrutable, and though its decrees appear to bear hard upon us at times, is nevertheless meant for gracious purposes.

George Washington to Bryan Fairfax, Valley Forge, March 1, 1778

The will of heaven is not to be controverted or scrutinized by the children of this world. It therefore becomes the creatures of it to submit with patience and resignation to the will of the Creator, whether it be to prolong or to shorten the number of our days, to bless them with health, or afflict them with pain.

George Washington to George Augustus Washington, Philadelphia, January 27, 1793

From the friendship I have borne you, and from the interest I have ever taken in whatever relates to your prosperity and happiness, I participated in the sorrows which I know you must have felt for your late heavy losses*. But it is not for man to scan the wisdom of Providence. The best he can do, is to submit to its decrees. Reason, religion and Philosophy, teaches us to do this, but 'tis time alone that can ameliorate the pangs of humanity, and soften its woes.

*The death of two children.

George Washington to Henry Knox, Philadelphia, March 2, 1797

Public Support for Ministers

No man's sentiments are more opposed to *any kind* of restraint upon religious principles than mine are [but he favors using tax dollars to support ministers].

George Washington to George Mason, Mount Vernon, October 3, 1785

God Helps America

No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States.

George Washington: First Inaugural Address, April 30, 1789

Religious Freedom

Every 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.

George Washington to the United Baptist Churches of Virginia, New York, May 1789

The liberty enjoyed by the people of these states of worshipping almighty God agreeable to their consciences is not only among the choicest of their blessings, but also of their rights.

George Washington to the Society of Quakers, New York, September 28, 1789

All those who conduct themselves as worthy members of the community are equally entitled to the protection of civil government. I hope ever to see America among the foremost nations in examples of justice and liberality.

George Washington to the Roman Catholics in the United States, New York, March
1790

The government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

George Washington to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Newport, R.I., August
18, 1790

In this land of equal liberty, it is our boast, that a man's religious tenets will not forfeit the protection of the laws, nor deprive him of the right of attaining and holding the highest offices that are known in the United States.

George Washington to the Members of the New Jerusalem Church of Baltimore,
Philadelphia, January 27, 1795

Religious Intolerance

Religious controversies are always productive of more acrimony and irreconcilable hatreds than those which spring from any other cause.

George Washington to Edward Newenham, Philadelphia, June 22, 1792

Of all the animosities which have existed among mankind, those which are caused by a difference of sentiments in religion appear to be the most inveterate and distressing, and ought most to be deprecated.

George Washington to Edward Newenham, Philadelphia, June 22, 1792

GEORGE WASHINGTON
And the Address of the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, R.I.
To the President of the United States of America

Newport Rhode Island August 17th 1790.

Sir

Permit the children of the Stock of Abraham to approach you with the most cordial affection and esteem for your person & merits and to join with our fellow Citizens in welcoming you to New Port.

With pleasure we reflect on those days--those days of difficulty, & danger when the God of Israel, who delivered David from the peril of the sword, shielded your head in the day of battle: and we rejoice to think, that the same Spirit who rested in the Bosom of the greatly beloved Daniel enabling him to preside over the Provinces of the Babylonish Empire, rests and ever will rest upon you, enabling you to discharge the arduous duties of Chief Magistrate in these States.

Deprived as we heretofore have been of the invaluable rights of free Citizens, we now (with a deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty disposer of all events) behold a Government, erected by the Majesty of the People--a Government, which to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance--but generously affording to All liberty of conscience, and immunities of Citizenship: deeming every one, of whatever Nation, tongue, or language, equal parts of the great governmental Machine: This so ample and extensive Federal Union whose basis is Philanthropy, Mutual Confidence and Publick Virtue, we cannot but acknowledge to be the work of the Great God, who ruleth in the Armies Of Heaven and among the Inhabitants of the Earth, doing whatever seemeth him good.

For all the Blessings of civil and religious liberty which we enjoy under an equal and benign administration, we desire to send up our thanks to the Antient of Days, the great preserver of Men--beseeching him, that the Angel who conducted our forefathers through the wilderness into the promised land, may graciously conduct you through all the difficulties and dangers of this mortal life: and, when like Joshua full of days and full of honour, you are gathered to your Fathers, may you be admitted into the Heavenly Paradise to partake of the water of life, and the tree of immortality.

Done and Signed by Order of the Hebrew Congregation in Newport Rhode Island

Moses Seixas, Warden

Adapted from *The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series*, W. W. Abbot et al., eds., vol. 6, pp. 284-86 (Mark A. Mastromarino, volume editor), University Press of Virginia (Charlottesville, 1996).

Response of Washington to Hebrew Congregation of Newport, R.I.

This letter, signed by Washington and deposited at the B'Nai B'rith in Washington, D.C., has been reprinted widely in facsimile. Other contemporary copies of the letter include Washington's letter-book copy in the Library of Congress, and a copy in the Netherlands, Algemein Rijksarchief: Collection Jorissen. Also, photographic copies of the letter signed are in the Rhode Island Historical Society and the Library of Congress.

The letter is in the writing of Washington's secretary Tobias Lear. For a misguided suggestion that Jefferson originally drafted the president's reply to the address of Newport's Jewish congregation, long regarded as Washington's most prominent pronouncement on religious toleration, see Julian P. Boyd et al, eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 19, p. 610; see also Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington: A Biography*, vol. 6, p. 275, note 136.]

To the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island

[Newport, R.I., 18 August 1790]

Gentlemen.

While I receive, with much satisfaction, your Address replete with expressions of affection and esteem; I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you, that I shall always retain a grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced in my visit to Newport, [1] from all classes of Citizens.

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past is rendered the more sweet, from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security. If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good Government, to become a great and a happy people.

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my Administration, and fervent wishes for my felicity. May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several

vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy.

Go: Washington

Notes

1. See Washington to the Clergy of Newport, R.I., 18 Aug. 1790, note 2, in *Papers, Presidential Series*. vol. 6.

George Washington's Thanksgiving Proclamation, 1789

On 25 September 1789, Elias Boudinot of Burlington, New Jersey, introduced in the United States House of Representatives a resolution "That a joint committee of both Houses be directed to wait upon the President of the United States, to request that he would 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 Constitution of government for their safety and happiness." The House was not unanimous in its determination to give thanks. Aedanus Burke of South Carolina objected that he "did not like this mimicking of European customs, where they made a mere mockery of thanksgivings." Thomas Tudor Tucker "thought the House had no business to interfere in a matter which did not concern them. Why should the President direct the people to do what, perhaps, they have no mind to do? They may not be inclined to return thanks for a Constitution until they have experienced that it promotes their safety and happiness. We do not yet know but they may have reason to be dissatisfied with the effects it has already produced; but whether this be so or not, it is a business with which Congress have nothing to do; it is a religious matter, and, as

such, is proscribed to us. If a day of thanksgiving must take place, let it be done by the authority of the several States." [1]

Citing biblical precedents and resolutions of the Continental Congress, the proponents of a Thanksgiving celebration prevailed, and the House appointed a committee consisting of Elias Boudinot, Roger Sherman, and Peter Silvester to approach President Washington. The Senate agreed to the resolution on 26 September and appointed William Samuel Johnson and Ralph Izard to the joint committee. On 28 September the Senate committee reported that they had laid the resolution before the president. [2] Washington issued the proclamation on 3 October, designating a day of prayer and thanksgiving.

Whatever reservations may have been held by some public officials, the day was widely celebrated throughout the nation. The Virginia assembly, for example, resolved on 19 November that the chaplain "to this House, be accordingly requested to perform divine service, and to preach a sermon in the Capitol, before the General Assembly, suitable to the importance and solemnity of the occasion, on the said 26th day of November." [3] Most newspapers printed the proclamation and announced plans for public functions in honor of the day. Many churches celebrated the occasions by soliciting donations for the poor. Washington's secretary, Tobias Lear, wrote to John Rodgers, pastor of the two Presbyterian churches in New York City, on 28 November, that "by direction of the President of the United States I have the pleasure to send you twenty five dollars to be applied towards relieving the poor of the Presbyterian Churches. A paragraph in the papers mentioned that a contribution would be made for that purpose on Thanksgiving day; as no opportunity offered of doing it at that time, and not knowing into whose hands the money should be lodged which might be given afterwards--The President of the United States has directed me to send it to you, requesting that you will be so good as to put it into the way of answering the charitable purpose for which it is intended." [4]

Washington enclosed the Thanksgiving Proclamation in his Circular to the Governors of the States, written at New York on 3 October 1789: "I do myself the honor to enclose to your Excellency a Proclamation for a general Thanksgiving which I must request the favor of

you to have published and made known in your State in the way and manner that shall be most agreeable to yourself." [5]

The original document used here online is the Library of Congress copy (DS, DLC:GW) of the Thanksgiving Proclamation.

Notes

The above is adapted from the annotation to Washington's Circular to the Governors of the States, 3 October 1789, printed in volume 4 of *The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series*, W. W. Abbot, Dorothy Twohig, et al (University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville and London, 1993; Dorothy Twohig, volume editor), pp. 129-30.

1. Joseph Gales, Sr., compiler. *The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States; with an Appendix, Containing Important State Papers and Public Documents, and All the Laws of a Public Nature. (Annals of Congress.)* 42 vols. Washington, D.C., 1834-1856, pp. 1:949-50.

2. Linda G. De Pauw et al., eds. *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America*. 8 volumes to date. Baltimore, 1972-- , pp. 1:192, 197; 3:232, 238.

3. *Journal of the House of Delegates of the Commonwealth of Virginia; Begun and Holden in the City of Richmond . . . on Monday, the Nineteenth Day of October, in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty-nine*. Richmond, 1828, p. 70.

4. National Archives, Record Group 59, Miscellaneous Letters. Washington, D.C.

5. W. W. Abbot, Dorothy Twohig, et al, eds. *The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series*. Charlottesville, 1987-- , pp. 4:129-32.

New York, 3 October 1789]

By the President of the United States of America. a Proclamation.

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."

Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be--That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks--for his kind care and protection of the People of this Country previous to their becoming a Nation--for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his Providence which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war--for the great degree of tranquillity, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed--for the peaceable and rational manner, in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One now lately instituted--for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed; and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and in general for all the great and various favors which he hath been pleased to confer upon us.

and also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions--to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually--to render our national government a blessing to all the people, by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed--to protect and guide all Sovereigns and Nations (especially such as have shewn kindness unto us) and to bless them with good government, peace, and concord--To promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the encrease of science among them and us--and generally to grant unto all Mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best.

Given under my hand at the City of New-York the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789.

Go: Washington

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S FAREWELL ADDRESS, 1796

. . . Citizens, by birth or choice, of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affections. The name of American, which belongs to you in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of patriotism more than any appellation derived from local discriminations. With slight shades of difference, you have the same religion, manners, habits, and political principles. You have in a common cause fought and triumphed together; the independence and liberty you possess are the work of joint counsels, and joint efforts of common dangers, sufferings, and successes.

But these considerations, however powerfully they address themselves to your sensibility, are greatly outweighed by those which apply more immediately to your interest. Here every portion of our country finds the most commanding motives for carefully guarding and preserving the union of the whole.

. . . Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked: Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded

to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.