

An Illegitimate Objection: Religion and Government

"Religion and government should be completely separate." This is the outcry of most liberal commentators and a view held by many Americans. Unfortunately, it is often heard by the courts and legislative authorities. The twentieth century saw the removal of prayer and Christian symbols such as the Ten Commandments from public places and the secularization of such powers as education. However, is this truly what the Founding Fathers intended? When writing the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, did they intentionally bring forth a society devoid of any religious connections? A deeper examination reveals that this is not the case. Although they did not seek to form a theocracy, the Founders, through their own writings as well as the Constitution, certainly understood the importance of a Judeo-Christian basis for government.

In any study of the Founders' intentions and meaning, the most crucial cast of characters to consider is the Founders themselves. In the area of practical religion, they cherished an idea of immutable freedom. As Samuel Adams wrote in 1772, "Every man living in or out of a state of civil society has a right peaceably and quietly to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience" ("Rights" 116). Whether a man lives under a government or in a state of isolation, he has the right to freely practice his religion, according to America's framers. Additionally, the Founders asserted that even non-believers are expected to assume Christian virtues in their lives. In the 1776 Virginia Declaration of Rights, George Mason affirms, "It is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity towards each other" (Declaration). Religion is paramount to a prosperous society. Clearly, the Founding Fathers understood the importance of religious freedoms.

Finally, as with any question of rights and original intent, the ultimate resource to be analyzed is the Constitution of the United States. As many secularists gleefully point out, the text

of the Constitution itself contains no mention of God by name. However, as attorney and author John Whitehead observes, the belief in a Creator and the Judeo-Christian framework is not mentioned in the text because it was indisputably understood by the Founding Fathers and the colonial citizens. Writing in *The Second American Revolution*, Whitehead declares, "All states of the United States of America have expressed either in their preambles or the body of the state constitution itself dependence on God... When the federal constitution was drafted, the principle of faith in God was presumed to be a universal for healthy civil government" (96). The presence of God in the lives of men was a basic assumption for the Founders of America. In addition, the First Amendment's Establishment Clause, which is often used to enforce the doctrine of separation of church and state, was originally created to protect religious freedom. As Vermont representative James Meacham observed in 1854, "At the time of the adoption of the Constitution and the amendments, the universal sentiment was that Christianity should be encouraged.... Any attempt to level or discard all religion would have been met with universal indignation" (Federer, 169). Using the First Amendment to crusade against Christianity would have incensed the Constitution's writers. In short, the Founders did not intend to limit Christian freedoms with the First Amendment but to protect them.

The Founding Fathers made their views about religion and government incontrovertibly clear. In their writings and documents from the time of the Revolution, America's framers asserted that religious freedom was a right to be firmly protected by the government. Also, the Constitution conveys a profound yet subtextual understanding of the presence of God and a guarantee against religious encroachment in the First Amendment. The more significant of these, however, is the Constitutional aspect because the Constitution is the basis of federal American law. In addition, although the other criteria are certainly important to an understanding of

religious freedom, only the Constitution is a legally binding source that can limit the government. Finally, the understanding of Judeo-Christian values in America's founding document clarifies the Founders' intent for the First Amendment and the separation of church and state debate. Overall, the secular outcry is illegitimate; America was founded with an extensive respect for Christian principles and freedoms.

Works Cited

Adams, Samuel. "Rights of the Colonists." *The Revolutionary Age*. David Quine. 2nd ed. Cornerstone Curriculum Project, 2011. 116-20.

Mason, George. Virginia Declaration of Rights. The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/virginia.asp.

Federer, William J. *America's God and Country: Encyclopedia of Quotations*. St. Louis, AmeriSearch Inc., 2000.

Whitehead, John W. *The Second American Revolution*. Charlottesville, The Rutherford Institute, 2010.