

THE WALL THAT PROTESTANTISM BUILT

The Religious Reasons for the Separation of Church and State

BENJAMIN HART

Upon my arrival in the United States, the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention; and the longer I stayed there the more did I perceive the great political consequences resulting from the state of things, to which I was unaccustomed. In France I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom pursuing courses diametrically opposed to each other; but in America I found that they were intimately united, and that they reigned in common over the same country. My desire to discover the cause of this phenomenon increased from day to day. In order to satisfy it I questioned the members of all the different sects. . . . I found that they differed upon matters of detail alone; and that they mainly attributed the peaceful dominion of religion in their country to the separation of church and state.

—Alexis de Tocqueville
Democracy in America (1835)

Americans are more confused about the separation of church and state than they were in Tocqueville's day. Many civil libertarians view separation as a constitutional principle, grounded in the secular thought of the Enlightenment, that must be jealously protected from the onslaughts of religious fundamentalism. Meanwhile, many evangelical Christians argue that separation is an alien interpretation grafted onto the Constitution by secular humanists whose intention is to undermine religion. Both of these positions are misreadings of history. The separation of church and state was one of the most cherished principles of our Founding Fathers, but its origins were more theological than secular. Its roots can be traced to the religious beliefs of the dissenting Protestants who formed the overwhelming majority of the American population at the time of the Revolution, and whose form of Christianity is carried on by evangelicals today.

The separation of church and state was the logical extension of the theology of Protestantism, which stresses the individual's personal relationship with God, unbrokered by human institutions whether political or religious. In Europe, the Protestant Reformation usually led to the replacement of Roman Catholic establishments by Protestant ones, such as the Church of England. But most

of the settlers of the American colonies were dissenting Protestants fleeing the establishments of Catholicism and Anglicanism alike. By the time of the American Revolution, the religious composition of the nation was 98.4 percent Protestant, 1.4 percent Roman Catholic, and 0.15 percent Jewish. Moreover, among the Protestants, 75 percent were dissenting (non-Anglican) sects, mostly of Puritan extraction: Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists, Quakers, and others. These dissenting Protestants set the pattern for the attitudes of Americans—including American Catholics—toward church and state.

Wycliffe: Bibles to the People

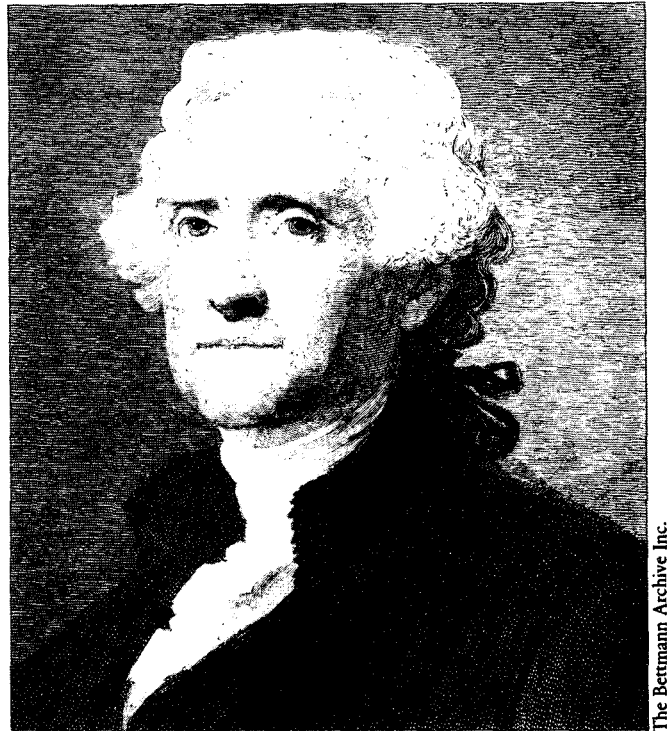
Puritanism was never a particular denomination, but rather represented a tendency that manifested itself in many different sects. The Puritan impulse was to contrast the pure Christianity of the New Testament with what it believed to be the corrupt Christianity practiced by existing religious institutions.

John Wycliffe, writing in the 14th century, more than a century before the Protestant Reformation, was the father of the Puritan movement in England. He attacked papal extravagance and temporal power, noting that the primacy of Peter in the New Testament was not in worldly grandeur and might, but in faith and humility. Christ himself had no political power, Wycliffe pointed out in *De Potestate Papae*: "It is the plain fact that no man should be pope unless he is the son of Christ and Peter, imitating them in deeds." For his arguments, Wycliffe relied on Scripture, often comparing the wealth and pomp of the popes of the Middle Ages with the poverty and humility of Peter. He also attacked what he called the "Caesarean clergy," and articulated the separation of church and state concept in even more radical terms than our own First Amendment: "No man is honorable who joins together the peculiar value and authority of the clerical office with the authority and value of the lay office." Such a union was "inexcusable" and "blasphemous."

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Roger Williams coined the phrase, "wall of separation between church and state," that Jefferson used in his letter to the Danbury Baptists.

Scripture, he believed, was a far better authority than a pope or priest—"the Bible is one perfect word proceeding from the mouth of God." Following this conviction, Wycliffe produced the first English translation of Scripture, to permit average people to circumvent church authorities and read God's words for themselves, in their native tongue instead of in High Latin. Wycliffe wanted the believer to know God personally and go to Him directly, rather than through church officials. Salvation was solely a matter between the individual and his Maker, and had nothing to do with the state or any human authority. Wycliffe also organized a corps of preachers to bring the Bible to the poor and illiterate. This enterprise began what became known as the Lollard Movement, and had major social and political implications for England and, later, America.

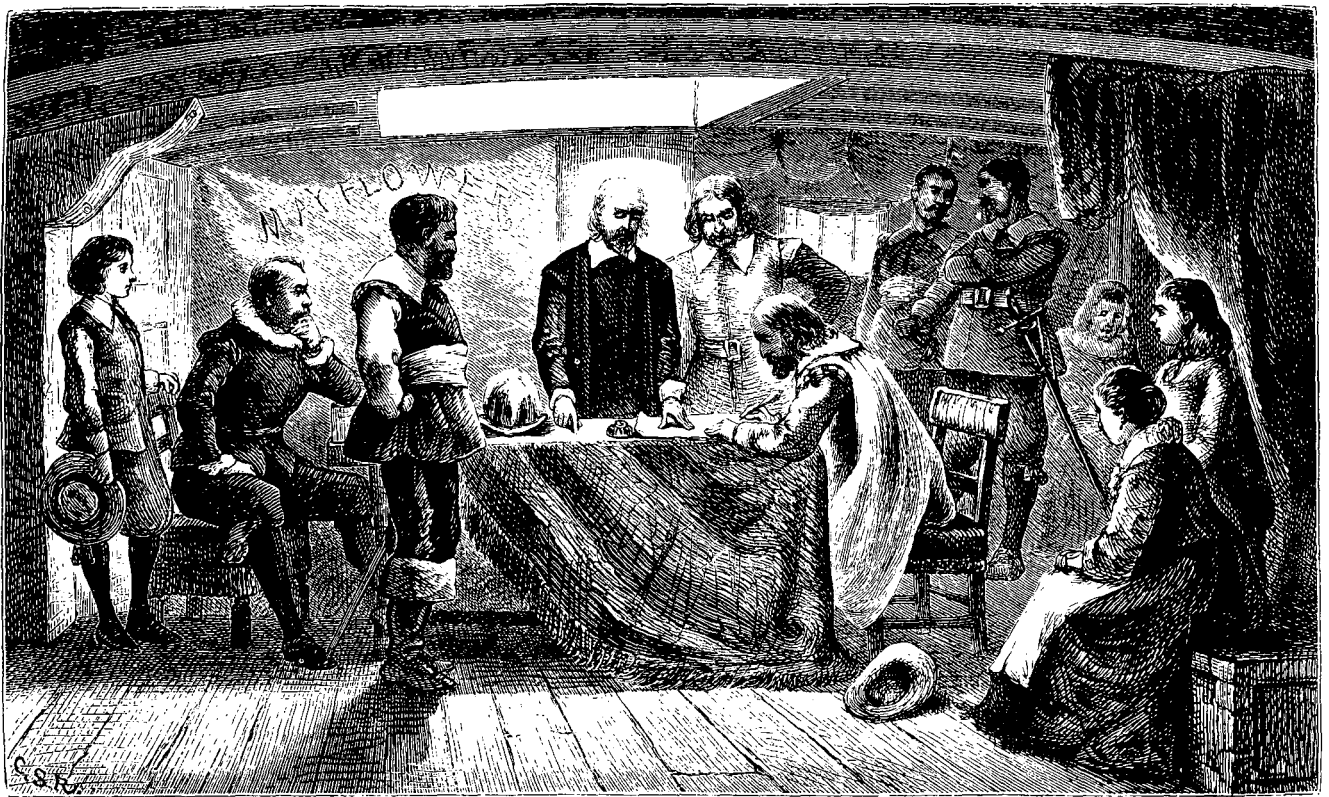
The tendency of Lollardy and its children was to tear away authoritarian structures, to undermine hierarchy, and to decentralize. Lollard theology challenged directly the church-state relationship, and the collision that resulted was often bloody. Henry IV and other 15th-century monarchs advanced a systematic campaign to suppress Lollardy. Thousands of martyrs were burned at the stake. Wycliffe's works were incinerated in 1410. His bones were exhumed in 1482, burned, and the ashes scattered into the River Swift. Despite all this, complaints were rampant in ruling circles that the Lollard "heresy" continued to spread. Everywhere the heresy was the same: the Bible is the sole authority, everyone is his own priest, and unlicensed preaching in private homes is desirable. Historians estimate that by the middle of the 15th century half the English population held Lollard views. Although the Anglican Church, with Lollard support, had under Henry VIII

broken with Rome, to the dissenting Lollard Protestants there seemed little difference between Roman Catholicism and English Anglicanism. After the break, the Anglican Church service underwent a few modifications, but remained almost identical to the Catholic Mass. What had occurred in England was a schism, not a reformation. The church-state relationship was still intact, in fact more firmly than before.

The Pilgrims' Voluntary Covenant

The Pilgrims of Plymouth, Massachusetts, came out of this Lollard tradition. Pastor John Robinson formed a congregation in Scrooby, England, that met in the home of Postmaster William Brewster, and were often called "Brownists," after Robert Browne who had founded a Congregational church at Norwich. In his famous *Treatise of Reformation Without Tarrying for Any*, Browne outlined his view of the church: "The church planted or gathered here is a company or number of Christians or believers which, by willing covenant made with God, are under the government of God and Christ, and keep His laws in one holy communion." Robinson's view of the church, which was similar, can be found in his *Justification of Separation from the Church of England*, published in 1610: "A company of faithful people thus covenanting together are a church, though they may be without officers among them, contrary to your popish opinion." These were, in other words, *voluntary* assemblies of the faithful.

Harried by King James I, Robinson's Scrooby congregation fled to Holland, and then embarked on a precarious journey across the Atlantic in the *Mayflower*. Robinson wrote that like "the people of God in old time, they were called out of Babylon, the place of their bodily bondage,



John Locke's social contract theory was based in part on the Pilgrims' Mayflower Compact.

and were to come to Jerusalem, and there build the Lord's temple."

The Pilgrim mission was purely religious: to follow God's will as outlined in the Bible, unencumbered by corrupt human ecclesiastical and governing institutions. But it also had important implications for the American political order. In the autumn of 1620 before disembarking at Plymouth, the Pilgrims signed the historic Mayflower Compact—an agreement, a sacred "covenant," making them a "civil body politic," and promising "just and equal laws." This covenant had a powerful impact on the "social contract" thinking of John Locke. Locke was educated by Protestant dissenters in England; his ardent spirit for liberty developed largely from his admiration of Protestant sects founded on the "right of private judgment." Locke was committed not only to their political cause of religious liberty, but was sympathetic also to their religious convictions. He took much of his social contract theory from Scripture and his experience with the congregational churches, which were patterned after the apostolic churches.

Robinson's Scrooby congregation generally held more radical views than those who came over a decade later in the Great Puritan Migration of the 1630s. Robinson's followers were Separatists; they wanted nothing to do with the Church of England, which they viewed as an apostate church. However, John Winthrop, the founder of Massachusetts Bay, and his followers considered themselves still to be part of the Anglican Church, although they believed the Church in its present form to be corrupt and ungodly. They sought to establish a genuine Bible commonwealth

as a model for the Anglican Church.

Nevertheless, even in Massachusetts Bay we find the seeds of separation of church and state. In his discourse on civil government, the Reverend John Cotton, one of the leaders of the Bay, argued that in a Christian commonwealth civil and ecclesiastical jurisdictions must be separate and distinct: "For in a Christian communion there are . . . different administrations . . . ecclesiastical and civil: ecclesiastical administrators are a divine order appointed to believers for holy communing of holy things; civil administrators are a human order appointed by God to men for civil fellowship of human things." Both administrations are the gift of God for man's benefit, Cotton maintained, "yet they differ in their . . . ends. . . . The things about which civil power is primarily conversant are . . . the things of this life [such] as goods, lands, honor, the liberties and peace of the outward man. The things whereby church power is exercised are . . . the things of God [such] as the souls and consciences of men, the doctrine and worship of God, the communion of saints. Hence they also have: a) different laws, b) different officers, c) different powers . . . according to their different objects and ends."

Thomas Hooker's Separation

Following this reasoning, church officers in Massachusetts Bay were prohibited by law from holding civil office. Moreover, New England Puritanism tended always to move toward the Separatist Protestantism of the Plymouth community. Indeed, New England was settled almost entirely by migrating congregations that split off from the mother colony at Massachusetts Bay, each attempting to

establish a more pristine Christian community modeled after the early churches found in the New Testament's Book of Acts, and each founder, usually a minister, trying to "out-Protestantize" the others.

Thomas Hooker, who settled Hartford, Connecticut, played an important role in developing a Christian doctrine of separation. Although he himself was not an avowed Separatist, he had many Separatist followers. Hooker's views on the Congregational church polity were essentially democratic, and are explained in his great work, *A Survey of the Sum of Church Discipline*. The Anglican Church condemned the work as heretical, especially Hooker's apologetics on behalf of "liberty of conscience."

Thomas Hooker criticized not only the Church of England, but also the New England congregations, which he thought were too quick to censure and excommunicate. He sought always to lower barriers to church membership, believing it was far better to let in a few "hypocrites" than mistakenly to exclude true Christians. Hooker thought church discipline should be as uncoercive as possible. During his ministry only one person was excommunicated from his church.

On January 14, 1639, the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, which included many provisions essential to free and open government, were adopted under the direction of Thomas Hooker. Each town was to have proportional representation, and each was to send elected representatives to the government in Hartford. In the event the governor acted arbitrarily or attempted to govern contrary to established laws, the people were entitled to call a convention and dispose of the affairs of the commonwealth. The Fundamental Orders provided for regular elections, while setting strict limits on the power of those elected. Moreover, the franchise was not limited to church members (as it was in Massachusetts Bay); voters in Hooker's colony merely had to be inhabitants of "honest conversation," though they could not be Quakers or atheists.

Though Hooker was a democrat who believed fervently in protecting people's right to be wrong, he was not a moral relativist or theological liberal. He believed Scripture to be absolutely inerrant, and that for every act of church or civil government a specific chapter and verse must be cited. Thus, Connecticut from its earliest days was ruled by laws rather than by men. While stressing that God is infinitely humane, as illustrated by Jesus healing the afflicted, Hooker also warned that "mercy will never save you unless it rules you, too." This idea became the underlying principle of Connecticut's government.

Roger Williams' Garden

The ministry of Roger Williams was another important landmark for America's evolving tradition of religious liberty. Williams, like Hooker, believed Massachusetts Bay had fallen short of the New Testament church model, but unlike Hooker he decided to stay and fight. Williams, who arrived in Massachusetts in 1631, first attacked the Bay churches for failing to sever completely their ties with the Church of England.

A stricter Calvinist than mainstream New Englanders on such issues as predestination and irresistible grace, Williams argued that the Massachusetts churches had been

too lax in admitting "non-elect" people, mixing the "herds of the world" with the "flock of Christ." He denounced the residency oath on the grounds that "a magistrate ought not to tender an oath to an unregenerate man." He believed church and state should be utterly separate because he believed that the state poisons Christianity, and that Jesus, not a cabal of government officials, selects His people. He argued that civil society must be completely secularized so that the religious life would be authentically spiritual. " 'Tis but worldly policy and compliance with men and times (God's mercy overruling)" that leads men to "murdering thousands and tens of thousands," he said.

The separation of church and state was the logical extension of Protestantism, which stresses the individual's personal relationship with God, unbrokered by human institutions whether political or religious.

Williams was an Anabaptist, a radical Separatist, who represented an extreme of the Protestant spectrum, indeed too extreme for the General Court of Massachusetts Bay. He was expelled from the colony. In January 1636, he and five of his followers bought from the Indians a plot of land at Narragansett Bay and founded "Providence."

Rhode Island became a haven for dissident Christian denominations. Williams favored religious liberty, not because he thought it was the most economical and peaceful way for people to live together, but because he saw freedom as a preliminary requirement for a truly Christian pilgrimage. He never sought to place natural rights ahead of the Holy Spirit in importance, a crucial distinction in recounting the history of American political ideas. As the Harvard historian Perry Miller writes, for Williams "there was never any virtue in freedom of and by itself; freedom was something of a negative, which protects men from worldly compulsions in a world where any compulsion, most of all one to virtue, increases the quantity of sin. Liberty was a way of not adding to the stock of human depravity; were men not sinful, there would be no need of freedom."

Thomas Jefferson almost two centuries later would echo Williams's views in a letter addressed to the Danbury (Connecticut) Baptist Association on January 1, 1802. Jefferson wrote:

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions



George Whitefield and the Great Awakening of the 18th century. No single person, priest, or institution could be considered the sole oracle of truth.

only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that an 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* [emphasis added].

Interestingly, Jefferson borrowed from Williams this now famous phrase—“a wall of separation between church and state”—when he wrote to assure the Baptist ministers in Connecticut that the federal government could in no way interfere with the religious practices of their churches and local communities. In recent years, the separation of church and state principle has been used by some civil libertarians as a weapon to ban religious expression in public schools (a development that most likely would have horrified both Williams and Jefferson). Williams and Jefferson sought not to undermine religion but to remove the instruments of coercion so that the spirit of true religious faith and conviction might flourish.

John Clark was another Anabaptist disrupter. He followed Williams to Rhode Island, but decided to return to Boston in 1651 where he and some of his followers were fined (less for their views than for the fact that they were making public nuisances of themselves). Clark subse-

quently published a small tract entitled *Ill News from New England* in which he outlined abuses of civil liberties taking place in the Bay and argued that Christ gave no man authority to compel the consciences of others. Clark’s arguments were convincing and by 1686 Baptist churches began springing up along the Eastern Shore.

The Quakers’ Inner Light

Like the Baptists, the Quakers rejected all mediators between the individual and God. They broke with mainline Christianity, however, with their reliance on what they called the “inner light,” God’s direct revelation to each individual, which in their view superseded even Scripture. In stark contrast to orthodox Christians (whether Puritan, Anglican, or Catholic), the Quakers believed that the “inner light” enabled everyone to overcome sin, whether or not they had heard the Gospel; they also believed human nature to be naturally virtuous. Thus, there was no need for formal religious institutions of any kind.

The Quakers applied their libertarian theological perspective to politics. With the “inner light” guiding behavior, not only were churches not needed, government was not needed either. William Penn, who founded Pennsylvania in 1681, shared this view. Penn’s famous constitution for the colony, the Charter of Liberties, guaranteed more freedoms than any previous constitution. Penn was reluctant to prescribe any political form at all, but was then convinced that “any government is free to the people under it (whatever be the frame) where laws rule.” Although Quakerism was the official religion of Pennsylvania, Penn stressed that no religion would be compulsory. As a result, Pennsylvania enjoyed tremendous prosperity as Lutherans, Huguenots, Mennonites, and Catholics from Europe poured into the colony on the promise of religious liberty.

The Quakers had to leave the Pennsylvania Assembly during the French and Indian War of the 1750s, however, because their pacifist philosophy did not permit them to mount any kind of armed defense, even when the Indians routinely massacred the mostly non-Quaker settlers on Pennsylvania’s western frontier. The Quaker aversion to violence also meant refusal to fight for American independence and they generally retreated from public life. Thus, the Quakers had little influence ultimately on the shape of the nation’s political order.

Rock ‘n’ Roll Revivalism

Far more important was the Great Awakening in religion, which occurred in the colonies during the mid-18th century. Although the revival was not an explicitly political movement, it had profound political implications. It is difficult for today’s readers to fully comprehend the power of the Great Awakening, but if we could see television footage of the events that took place across the American countryside during the revival, first sparked by Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, Massachusetts, and carried on by other revivalist preachers, the combination of the civil-rights movement, campus riots, and rock festivals of the 1960s would appear mild in comparison.

Ironically, the man who came to symbolize the revival was an Anglican from England named George Whitefield who was a friend of both John and Charles Wesley, the

founders of Methodism. Whitefield, the “boy preacher,” arrived in America in 1738 at age 19. America’s first traveling evangelist, he preached in spectacular fashion in the open fields of hundreds of towns and villages. His voice could be heard clearly without the assistance of electronic device by 30,000 people. One especially spellbinding sermon was delivered from the courthouse steps of Philadelphia. The mob filled Market Street and stretched down Second Street. The people of Philadelphia craned their necks out windows to hear him lambaste the clergy of the mainline churches, calling them unconverted and strangers to Christ.

“Father Abraham,” Whitefield bellowed, “whom have you in Heaven? Any Episcopalians? No! Any Presbyterians? No! Any Independents or Seceders, New Sides or Old Sides, any Methodists? No! No! No! Whom have you there, then, Father Abraham? We don’t know these names here! All who have come are *Christians*—believers in Christ, men who have overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of His testimony. Oh, is that the case? Then God help me, God help us all, to forget having names and become Christians in deed and in truth.” He waved his arms, gestured violently, shouted and danced to the delight of the gathering throngs, who had grown weary of the highbrow, heavily annotated and gentlemanly styles of preachers from Harvard and Yale. During a Whitefield sermon, people often would shriek, roll on the ground, dissolve into tears, or run wild with religious ecstasy.

Franklin Empties His Pockets

Even the agnostic philosopher David Hume once said of Whitefield that it was worth traveling 20 miles to hear him. The usually skeptical Benjamin Franklin admitted that Whitefield’s “oratory made me ashamed. . . . I emptied my pockets in the collection dish, gold and all.” Franklin wrote of “the extraordinary influence of Whitefield on his hearers,” saying that afterwards “one could not walk through the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street.”

Other revivalist preachers imitated Whitefield and descended with zeal upon the various mainline Protestant churches, which were often distressed at the threat the Awakeners posed to the social fabric. The revival crossed denominational boundaries and put constant pressure on established religious and governing institutions. No minister, no official, was immune from verbal assaults by these “New Light” preachers. This had a leveling effect on privileged position, and as such was a powerful democratic force. Anyone could have his say. No single person, priest, class of people, or institution could be considered the sole oracle of truth. Revival was incompatible with theocracy or aristocracy. “Who said one needed a license or a college degree to preach the Gospel?” the Awakeners would ask. “Certainly not Jesus.” Like politicians and businessmen, ministers, too, would have to compete in the marketplace.

In 1755, Baptists from Connecticut traveled to North Carolina and began rolling, singing, and shouting in religious ecstasy. They denounced the Anglican clergy, endured occasional floggings and imprisonment, but rapidly gained a following. Their influence spread to Virginia, the stronghold of the planter aristocracy. It was from this

movement that Southern Christianity began to take its characteristic form. Among Whitefield’s most ardent followers were black slaves; the black Gospel music so popular today came out of this revivalist tradition. During the 1770s the Anglican Church still held sway in Virginia, but was tottering under the pressure of John Wesley’s Methodists, who shrilly denounced planter society for its spiritual complacency, extravagant living, and slave ownership.

King George’s Bishops

The struggle for religious freedom in America had nothing to do with hostility toward religion. Rather, it was a quest for spiritual purity, indeed for a more fervent and personal relationship with God than the state-run Anglican Church could offer. From its beginning, the colonization of America took place mostly under the auspices of pilgrimages of dissent. New England, especially, wanted no part of the British system; it would not abide by the protectionist trade laws imposed by the Navigation Acts, and above all wanted no part of the Anglican Church.

The First Amendment was intended to protect a religious people from government interference, not to protect government from a religious people.

The Crown was constantly threatening to install bishops in the colonies to administer American churches according to acceptable English ways. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, originally established in 1701 by the Church of England to convert the Indians, had become by the middle of the 18th century an instrument for bringing America’s Protestant dissidents into communion with the Anglican Church. Congregational, Presbyterian, and Baptist ministers would respond to every rumor of London’s imposition of bishops with flurries of impassioned sermons, scathing editorials, and shrill pamphlets denouncing the proposal. When the Reverend Jonathan Boucher, an Anglican rector from Annapolis, returned to England in 1775 he said the issue of bishops was the backbone of the revolutionary cause. According to the historian Arthur L. Cross, “the efforts of the Episcopalians to push their plan [to install bishops in America] was at least one of the causes tending to accentuate the growing alienation between Great Britain and her colonial subjects beyond the seas which prepared the ground for revolution soon to follow.”

The Reverend Jonathan Mayhew, a Harvard graduate and pastor at Boston’s West Church, passionately warned that bishops were instruments for “establishing tyrannies over the bodies and souls of men.” An Anglican bishop, in the minds of the dissenting denominations, was merely an extension of the arm of the London government—“differ-

ent branches of the same plan of power," as Mayhew put it. The great Protestant enterprise in America was to limit government power, especially in the area of religion.

The Americans saw all men and all human institutions as fallible—an essential Protestant tenet. Scripture was inerrant, according to the prevailing Protestant view, but institutions and even human understanding of the Scriptures were imperfect, which is why there were so many Protestant sects. But the fact that there were so many different

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. . . .

The Presbyterian Minister Caleb Wallace made a similar case in support of Jefferson's and Madison's bill. It is, he said,

impossible for the magistrate to adjudge to the right of preference among the various sects that profess the Christian faith without erecting the chair of infallibility, which would lead us back to the Church of Rome. . . . Neither can it be made to appear that the Gospel needs any such civil aid. We rather conceive that when our blessed Savior declares His kingdom is not of this world, He renounces all dependence on state power, and as His weapons are spiritual, and were only designed to have influence and judgment on the heart of man, we are persuaded that if mankind were left in the quiet possession of their inalienable rights and privileges, Christianity, as in the days of the Apostles, would continue to prevail and flourish in the greatest purity, by its own native excellence, and under the all disposing providence of God. . . .

This was the generally held American perspective. Liberty of conscience was good because it aided genuine Christianity. Most believed that in a free society, truth, if allowed to flourish, would prevail. To believe otherwise was to lack faith in the power of God's Word and His saving grace. Thus when the First Amendment to the Constitution, which includes the religion clause, was proposed by James Madison and the Congregationalist minister Fisher Ames, no one interpreted this measure as in any way hostile to Christianity.

Congress Shall Make No Law

The religion clause of the First Amendment states: *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.* The clear intention of the First Amendment was to guarantee freedom of religious expression. Its purpose was to protect a religious people from government interference, not to protect government from a religious people.

An important objective of the religion clause was to avert disunity among the states, which would have occurred if the federal government had favored a particular denomination over all others. The First Amendment was designed to avoid sectarian conflict over the control of the government. What could not occur under the American system was the establishment of, say, the Baptist Church as the official faith of the nation.

The First Amendment, however, in no way prevented the federal government from holding a general religious perspective. Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story, who was appointed to the Court by James Madison, wrote in his classic of American law, *Commentaries on the Constitu-*

Once the Catholic Church was decoupled from the state, as it was from the beginning in America, its influence tended to reinforce the spirit of freedom and democracy.

Christian sects did not bother most Americans, since most agreed on the essential doctrines of the faith. Americans wanted a government that did not favor one Christian sect over another. The general feeling was that competition between the various churches was desirable, tended to breathe fire into the religious life of a nation, and prevented one denomination from becoming complacent, comfortable, and arrogant, as had the Anglican Church.

Madison's Holy Author

The battle for religious freedom in Anglican Virginia between 1776 and 1786 is illustrative. As Thomas Jefferson noted in his autobiography, in Virginia, though the official church was Anglican, "the majority of our citizens were dissenters," meaning they were Separatist Protestants, the descendants of John Wycliffe and the Puritans. Indeed, reported Jefferson, "the first republican legislature was crowded with petitions to abolish the spiritual tyranny" of the Anglican Church.

The "Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom" to disestablish the Anglican Church was penned by Jefferson, proposed by James Madison, and passed by the Virginia assembly on January 16, 1786. There was almost no opposition to the bill in the final vote, not because there was any sentiment in Virginia against Christianity, but because there was steadfast opposition to the legally favored status of the Anglican Church, which had become a minority sect in Virginia. In fact, the bill justifies itself on Protestant theological principles:

Whereas Almighty God hath created the mind free; 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 His almighty power to do; that impious presumption of legislators and rulers, civil as

tion of the United States: "the real object of the First Amendment was not to countenance, much less advance, Mohammedanism, Judaism, or infidelity, by prostrating Christianity; but to exclude all rivalry among Christian sects, and to prevent any national ecclesiastical establishment which should give to a hierarchy the exclusive patronage of the national government. It thus cut off the means of persecution (the vice and pest of former ages), and the subversion of the rights of conscience in matters of religion which had been trampled upon almost from the days of the Apostles to the present age. . . ." Nevertheless, Story observed, "the general if not universal sentiment in America was that Christianity ought to receive encouragement from the state so far as it was not incompatible with the private rights of conscience and freedom of religious worship. An attempt to level all religions, and to make a matter of state policy to hold all in utter indifference, would have created universal disapprobation, if not universal indignation."

Evidence for Justice Story's view can be found in one of the initial acts of the first House of Representatives, which was to elect a chaplain, the Reverend William Linn, who was paid an annual salary of \$500 from federal funds. James Madison sat on the committee that recommended that Congress employ a chaplain. Also passed, the day after the First Amendment was adopted, was a national day of "Prayer and Thanksgiving," a holiday we still celebrate. As president, Madison issued numerous Thanksgiving Day proclamations that were extremely religious in content. Also, the First Amendment was in no way supposed to contradict the Northwest Ordinance, first passed in 1787 and reenacted in 1789, which set aside federal lands and funds for the building of schools in order to promote "religion, morality, and knowledge," such things "being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind."

To Bigotry No Sanction

Although Christianity was the general religious perspective of America's people and its government, it was not hostile to freedom for other religions. Indeed, America was a refuge for Jews fleeing persecution in Europe. Though the Jewish population during the American Revolution was small (only about 3,000), for the most part it staunchly supported the patriot cause. George Washington's celebrated statement that the U.S. government "gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance" was contained in a letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island. He wrote to a Savannah synagogue: "May the same wonder-working Deity, who long since delivered the Hebrews from their Egyptian oppressors, planted them in a promised land, *whose providential agency has lately been conspicuous in establishing these United States as an independent nation* [emphasis Washington's], still continue to water them with the dews of heaven and make the inhabitants of every denomination participate in the temporal and spiritual blessings of that people whose God is Jehovah."

From its earliest colonial beginnings, America was remarkably hospitable to the Jewish people. The Puritans, though dogmatic and unwavering in their own religious



John T. Hopf

Touro Synagogue, Newport, Rhode Island, built 1763.
Christian America was a refuge for Jews fleeing persecution in Europe.

convictions, felt for them a particular affection. The Puritans saw themselves as the new Israelites, driven out of England and into the wilderness by the Stuart kings, just as the children of Abraham were hounded out of Egypt and into the desert by Pharaoh. Cotton Mather suggested Hebrew as the national language. Oliver Cromwell, the great warrior and leader of the English Puritan Revolution, admitted the Jewish people back into England during his reign after they were earlier expelled. Roger Williams, one of the most fervent of the early American Protestants, argued "it to be the duty of civil magistrates to break down that superstitious wall of separation (as to civil things) between us Gentiles and the Jews, and freely (without their asking) to make way for their free and peaceable habitation amongst us." Moreover, Williams's case was drawn almost entirely from the Bible: 1) "The holy Scripture saith that they are a beloved people," and 2) "They are a people above all the people and nations in the world, under most gracious and express promises."

For Williams, a crucial test of a nation's true Christian spirit was its treatment of the Jews, whom the Puritans saw as God's first children. Williams argued that the spirit of persecution was "opposite" not only to the fundamental requirements of just social order, but "to the Jews' conversion to Christ, by not permitting them civil life or being." Thus, while there were certainly instances of religious intolerance, anti-Semitism was contrary not only to America's political tradition, but also to America's theological tradition.

Far more disparaged than the Jews in early America were

the Roman Catholics. Protestants considered Catholicism not only heretical, but also totalitarian—responsible for the initial marriage of church and state under the emperor Constantine. Maryland (colonized by Catholics) instituted in 1649 “An Act Concerning Religion,” providing for religious tolerance; Protestant adversaries charged, however, that the “papists” did this not from theological conviction, but because they were a minority in Maryland.

Attitudes toward the Catholic Church softened after the War of Independence when Catholic France helped save the American cause. In addition, American Catholics adopted Protestant notions of church and state. John Carroll, America’s first Catholic bishop, warned Rome not to intrude into American public affairs, and argued that America is proof that “general and equal toleration, by giving free circulation to fair argument, is the most effectual method to bring all denominations of Christians to a unity of faith.” Moreover, Carroll castigated those Protestants who claimed a monopoly on truth and morality. Indeed, Tocqueville, a Catholic, noted that once the Catholic Church was decoupled from the state, as it was from the beginning in America, its influence tended to reinforce the spirit of freedom and democracy.

Church without an Army

Ever since the Pilgrims first landed at Plymouth Rock, the vast majority of Americans have seen the roles of church and state as distinct—but as complementary and not contradictory. Indeed, the major reason the Separatists opposed the church-state union was that it necessarily subordinated the spiritual realm to secular concerns.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, not with an army, which suggested the way in which he chose to win converts. Indeed, Jesus explicitly commands his followers not to use force in conversions: “The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you” (Mark 10:42-3). Peter exhorts elders of the churches to “shepherd the flock among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God” (1 Peter 5:2). The early churches of the New Testament were autonomous, and though they were held together by a common faith, they carried out their respective duties in various ways. Paul wrote in a different style to the church at Rome than he did to the church at Corinth or the churches of Galatia, because their customs and ways of thinking were different.

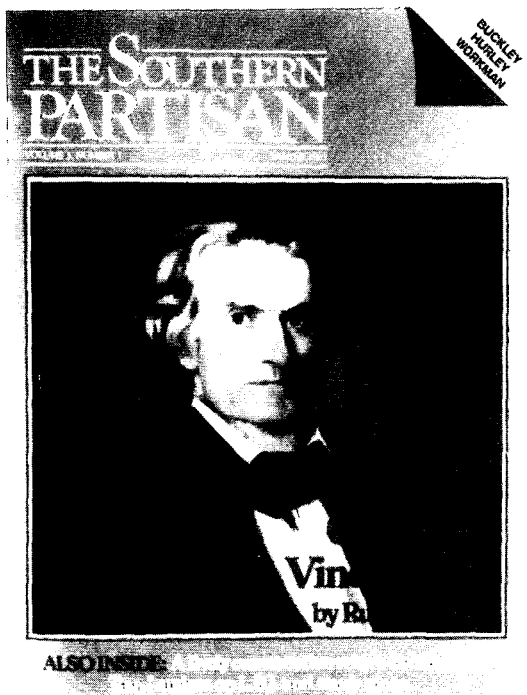
Paul says in his letter to the Romans (v. 13:4) that government’s purpose is to bring “wrath upon the one who practices evil,” meaning criminals, foreign invaders, and those who threaten the person, property and liberty of others. This is, in fact, the only government function explicitly sanctioned in the New Testament. The major source of conflict throughout history is the tendency of the state to take on the responsibilities of the church, even going beyond—defining dogma, compelling people to submit to authorities with whom they do not agree, and generally penetrating the domain of conscience. Significantly,

Paul’s letter to the Christians in Rome restricts the state to punishing wrongdoers and not wrong thinkers.

Flourishing Christianity

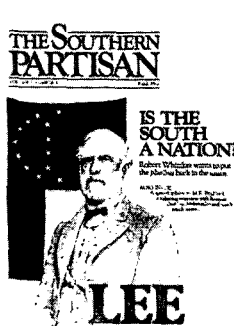
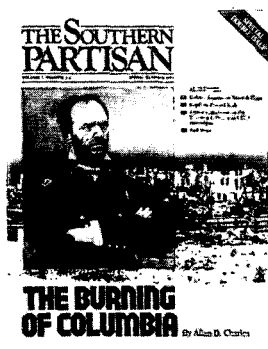
Despite the hostility of large segments of the intellectual community in America to Christianity, and ill-conceived decisions handed down by the Supreme Court regarding the First Amendment, America still remains by most measurable accounts the most Christian nation in the world (with the possible exception of Poland). According to a survey of American religious beliefs published by the *Washington Post* (April 5, 1986), 91 percent regard themselves as religious; 84 percent believe the Bible is the “actual” or “inspired” word of God; and 86 percent believe Christ rose from the dead. According to a Gallup Survey (April 1987), 69 percent defined themselves as members of a particular church or synagogue; while 57 percent said their religious faith could “answer all or most of today’s problems.” On any given Sunday more than 40 percent can be found in church. Thus the separation of church and state, far from undermining Christianity, has actually helped preserve America’s predominantly Christian character. By contrast, the national Christian churches still in existence—England’s Anglican Church and Sweden’s Lutheran Church, for example—are for the most part dead artifacts and exercise very little influence over the moral and spiritual lives of the people, suggesting that the quickest way to kill the religious life of a nation is through government involvement.

A strong case can be made that Christianity, and religion generally, is far stronger in officially atheist Russia than in Anglican England. Thus, the efforts of some well-intentioned Christians to obtain government sanction for their religious beliefs is misdirected, and indeed tends to subvert the very cause they wish to promote. The 18th-century British theologian Joseph Priestley maintained that even unbelievers have their purpose in the general plan; for in the face of their objections, Christianity is constantly forced to purge itself of human corruption and return to its original purity: “A Truth that has never been opposed cannot acquire that firm and unwavering assent, which is given to that which has stood the test of rigid examination.” Christianity, after all, spread most rapidly throughout the pagan world during the first three centuries, not when it was allied with the state but when it was opposed by the state. Moreover, Christians today need not find themselves on the defensive in the political debate when accused of attempting to “impose their views” on the rest of the nation; they can merely answer that it was Christianity that brought religious freedom to America in the first place. For, as the Whig statesman Edmund Burke predicted in his famous speech on reconciliation in the House of Commons in March 1775, London would inevitably fail to subject the American colonies to its will for the very reason that “the people are Protestants; and of that kind which is most adverse to all implicit subjection of mind and opinion.”



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THE RELUCTANT COWBOY

Sometimes the United States Must Act Alone

KIKI BHATIA

Governor Michael Dukakis's emphasis on "multilateralism" in American foreign policy—his insistence that America can "no longer roam the world like a lonesome cowboy"—sounds superficially appealing but would have damaging consequences if translated into policy. It is almost always desirable to keep our allies informed of our actions, and to seek their support and cooperation. But to let our allies veto our military movements would be a sugar-coated prescription for isolationism. To maintain peace and freedom in the next four years, the president of the United States must be prepared to exercise unilateral force when necessary.

As three episodes of the Reagan era illustrate, allied support is not always forthcoming for the decisive action needed to protect our security during a crisis. In all three cases, cooperation from the allies came only after the U.S., alone among the Western powers, moved swiftly to contain global or regional dangers.

Pacifying the Caribbean

October 25, 1983—A violent *coup d'état*, led by a radical, Soviet-armed Marxist faction on the Caribbean island of Grenada, prompted eight of its neighbors to appeal to the United States for protection. President Reagan moved forcefully and decisively, dispatching 15,000 Marines and airborne troops to rescue American students held hostage and to restore democracy. The U.S. informed no one until just before the operation began; any leak might have allowed the Grenadians and Cubans to beef up defenses, thus endangering the lives of American servicemen. "Prior consultation," according to Constantine Menges, Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs from 1983-86, "was neither feasible nor desirable."

Our European allies were shocked that the United States would take such bold action without first consulting them. Upon being informed of the planned invasion just hours before the landing began, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher telephoned President Reagan to urge him to reconsider. European leaders have always found American "gunboat diplomacy" distasteful, and Thatcher felt that this episode came at a particularly inopportune time—just prior to the politically sensitive West European deployment of Pershing IIs.

After the U.S. invasion, opposition leaders across the continent joined the British, French, West German, Dutch, Belgian, and Italian governments in expressing their disapproval. Words were not minced; a French delegate to the United Nations said, "France deeply deplores this armed intervention." The U.S. rapidly found itself isolated in multinational bodies such as the Organization of American States. In the U.N. Security Council, the United States was forced to stand by itself in vetoing a resolution, supported by 11 of the 14 other members of the council, condemning the invasion and demanding the removal of American troops. Britain joined Togo and Zaire in abstaining.

Reaction in the Caribbean was significantly different, however. Within three days of their arrival, American troops had rescued 800 American medical students, and subdued over 1,000 heavily armed Cuban "advisors." Huge caches of military equipment had been discovered, clearly indicating that Grenada's revolution was never intended to be self-contained. The bold use of force on Grenada broadcast to Cuba and Nicaragua that the United States would not tolerate Soviet-financed military expansionism in the Caribbean. Grenadians themselves greeted American troops as liberating heroes, and were concerned only that the United States might leave too soon, thereby opening the door to a Communist resurgence. Since 1983, democracy and economic stability have gradually returned to the tiny island.

As the positive results of American involvement became apparent, European and Latin American leaders quickly toned down their criticism. West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl spoke of the importance of being "understanding of the invasion." Previously silent leaders, such as former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, even stepped forward to express support for American actions: "Taking into account the information on the Cuban presence on the island of Grenada and also the construction of an airfield whose nature does not correspond to the normal needs of the island, I approve of the American intervention on Grenada." Meanwhile, deployment of the Pershing IIs proceeded on schedule in Europe, and the

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