

# What About the Separation of Church and State?

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I have to say, “Happy 247<sup>th</sup> Birthday, America!” On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1776, America’s birth certificate, the Declaration of Independence, was adopted by the members of the Second Continental Congress in the Pennsylvania State House in Philadelphia, later renamed Independence Hall. These men were courageous and selfless, for each one knew that they were committing treason the moment their pen hit the document. If caught by the British, they would be imprisoned and possibly hung. They signed it anyway.

Before I go any further, I strongly encourage you to read the Declaration of Independence for yourself and any children in your life. We have posted a readable transcription of the original document to assist you on our church website, [www.tcccdp.org](http://www.tcccdp.org). Notice how faith in God is not “separated” from this founding document.

The “Separation of Church and State” is a mantra we hear so often one would think it is the 11<sup>th</sup> Commandment. However, for 150 years, Americans understood the importance of faith (the “Church”) in society, culture, education, government, etc., because it provided the moral basis in which to raise responsible children, and establish a strong, safe, and prosperous nation. All of this changed when the Supreme Court wrongly interpreted Jefferson’s words to the Danbury Baptists (Oct. 7<sup>th</sup>, 1801) in a 1947 decision about reimbursing students’ bus fees who attended religious schools. Consequently, the phrase in Jefferson’s letter, “a wall of separation between the Church and the State,” has been erroneously cited ever since.

This historically ignorant interpretation opened the door to declaring a non-denominational 22-word daily school prayer unconstitutional in 1962. Then it banned the public reading of the Bible – without comment – in our schools the following year. A few years later, the 10 Commandments were deemed dangerous and removed from schools and courtrooms. So, as they say, “How’s that working for you?”

What kind of “separation” was Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, referring to? To answer that, we must go further back in time.

Henry VIII became King of England in 1509 at the untimely death of his older brother, King Arthur. King Henry is known for his many wives over the 38 years he reigned as King, beginning with his deceased brother’s wife, Catherine of Aragon. However, there was something more significant about his reign than how some of his wives “lost their heads.”

For years, King Henry was an ardent supporter of the Pope, that is, until he wanted his marriage to Catherine annulled. Reason? She had not given him a son. The “short version” of the story is that the King broke away from the Catholic Church and the Pope because he did not get his way. Then he had parliament declare him the supreme head of the (new) Church of England.

Even today, the King of England is given the title “Defender of the Faith,” a title you may have heard during the coronation of King Charles a few months ago. For Henry VIII, it meant he had taken control of the Church, including the appointment of bishops. In this bold move, the “State” had swallowed up the Church and conformed it to the wishes of the current monarch. Not only that, but the King’s new Church was declared the only true Church, and those who questioned or disagreed with the “Church of England” (i.e., The King) would face severe consequences.

In the following generations, two similar religious groups, the Pilgrims and the Separatists (note this latter group’s name), would challenge the unbiblical teachings and practices of the Church of England. They believed in the free exercise of religion and that no King or government had the authority to infringe upon their right. Unsurprisingly, the response from an all-powerful Church of England led by the King was harsh, and they had to flee for their lives. Eventually, traveling across the Atlantic Ocean, they unintentionally, yet providentially, landed at Plymouth Rock.

Now that you know the historical context which was all too familiar to our Founders – read Jefferson’s words to the Danbury Baptists (I have added explanatory notes within brackets – [x]):

“Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God; that he owes account to none other [except God] for his faith or his worship; that the legislative powers of the government reach actions only [i.e., “actions” = crimes, lawlessness, etc.], and not opinions [faith and beliefs about God], 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.”

And let us point out how belief in God was so pervasive within the culture that our Founding Fathers frequently spoke of “God, the Lord, the Creator, Divine, and Supreme Judge of the world.” Therefore, there can be no question that Jefferson (Founder of the American Bible Society) was speaking about ending the State’s ability to control the Church and the exercise of one’s religion.

As History Professor Larry Schwiebart (University of Dayton) said some years ago: “Jefferson’s wall of separation between Church and State clearly did not apply to a wall separating Church and Statesmen, for it was assumed by all that men of poor character could not govern. The unstated assumption beneath that was that character came from God and faith, not from man’s own works.” – Agreed! Men of poor character cannot govern.

Space does not allow me to expound further, but suffice it to say that throughout our founding documents, one cannot deny that the “omnipresence of Christianity in America provided the undergirding for everything our Founders said and did” (Schwiebart). In the Declaration of Independence alone, God is referenced four times.

Patrick Henry said in 1776: “It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great Nation was founded not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For that reason alone, people of other faiths have been afforded freedom of worship here.”

Wake up Church! Biblical principles and faith in God established and preserved this Nation; these are the only solutions to the lawlessness, corruption, and society’s disintegration. Join others to intercede for a genuine revival of Jesus’ Church, and a soul-stirring awakening of unbelievers – And let your light shine.

Quotes from: Larry Schwiebart, “Did You Know that Half the Declaration’s Signers Had Divinity School Training?” in History News Network website, The George Washington University, 2005. – And from Molly Carman, “The 56 Signers of the Declaration of Independence Memorial: Life, Liberty, and Legacy,” Family Research Council website, August 14, 2020.