

Separation of Church & State

by

Phil Rasmussen

Before discussing this topic we need to first define what religion is. According to Oxford Languages, religion is “the belief in and worship of a superhuman (having or showing exceptional ability or powers) power or powers, especially a God or gods.”

In other words religion can be belief in and/or worship of:

- God the Almighty (Christianity)
- A godlike deity (Pharaohs, Buddha, emperors, Dalai Lamas, etc.)
- A multitude of gods (Aztecs, Greek and Roman gods, Hindus, etc.)
- A person (kings, mythical/cultural persons/heroes, cult leaders, etc.)

In 1620, British immigrants, Pilgrims, left England for America. Their primary reason for leaving England was to escape religious persecution after King James I’s ruled that all British citizens must belong to the Church of England (CoE) (also referred to as the Anglican Church or Episcopal Church). This edict was extended by James’ son, Charles I.

The Pilgrims were a mixed batch of people consisting of separatists, non separatists, indentured servants, wards, and “contract” sailors. Of the 102 passengers, 54 were those breaking from the Church of England. It is unknown how many of the remaining passengers eventually broke away from the CoE.

Although the Pilgrims left England to escape religious persecution they did not believe in religious tolerance. Their society was theocratic and governed every aspect of their lives. Freedom of religion, speech or the press was a foreign concept. When other colonists arrived with differing beliefs, they were driven out the colony.

As more immigrants came to America, settlements developed and eventually they were grouped into 13 British colonies. Although the colonies had similar political, constitutional, and legal systems, they were dominated by Protestant leadership. Interestingly, the colonies were grouped into three geographic areas – New England colonies, the Middle colonies, and the Southern colonies.

While all of the colonies had a mixture of religions, the predominate religion(s) for each area were:

- New England Puritans
- Middle colonies Quakers, Catholics, Lutherans, Jews
- Southern colonies Anglican

In addition to the Bible, three (3) documents provide the framework America and the governance of its citizens.

Magna Carta. About 400 years prior to the Pilgrims exodus to America, the Magna Carta was established. While the Magna Carta contains two essential provisions guaranteeing freedom of the church from government authority, it also provided limited freedoms for the British people.

Prior to the Pilgrims arrival, the British Crown gave permission for John Cabot (1496) and Humphrey Gilbert (1578) to explore the New World. The permissions, called patents, contained religious language that directed the explorers to extend the CoE reach into the new lands.

Like the patents given to the explorers, the Crown also issued “charters” for the settlement of the 13 colonies. Likewise the charters contained religious language committing the colonists to governance based on Christianity.

Declaration of Independence. Our “Declaration of Independence” (DoI) was adopted in 1776 and marked the end to Britain’s authority and governance of American colonies. Interestingly, scholars continue asking the question as to whether the Declaration created a religious state or secular state. While secularists have been successful in removing the truth of America’s Christian origin in many areas such as oaths of office, the courts and law, and education, the fact is that America would not exist for not the influence of Christianity.

While the DoI was written based on Christian beliefs, there are four explicit references to God and numerous implied references.

1. **Introduction** – “. . .the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of **Nature's God** entitle them. . .”
2. **Preamble** – “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by **their Creator** with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”
3. **Conclusion** – “. . . We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by **their Creator** with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. . .”

“And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of **divine Providence**, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.”

In essence the DoI provided a theistic framework calling for America’s freedom from Britain. It does not contain any laws, rules or regulations. Although based on Christian beliefs, it does not call for Americans to be governed by any religion, nor does it declare any specific religion. The DoI is not a legal document and thus has no authority over our nation or its people. It also makes clear that governments are created by people and derive their powers from the consent of the governed, not from any god(s).

We should note that the Declaration is steeped in Judeo-Christian theology by which formed the basis of our nation’s laws. This is important to remember!

Constitution of the United States. While the “Magna Carta” and “Declaration of Independence” are not considered legal documents for American citizens the “Constitution of the United States” is. “The Constitution of the United States is the supreme law of the United States of America. It superseded the Articles of Confederation, the nation's first constitution, in 1789. Originally comprising seven articles, it delineates the national frame and constraints of government.” Wikipedia

The birth of America was much like women giving birth – it was painful. **Genesis 3:16** contains God’s word to women, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.” According to various studies the average length of first-time pregnancies is about 40 weeks (10-11 months, based on number of weeks per month).

From the time that America declared its independence in 1776, to when the Constitution was submitted for ratification in 1787, the birth of our nation took 11 years.

The first Constitution, generally referred to as the “Articles of Confederation,” and the initial US Constitution submitted in 1787, had little references to religion. It wasn’t until 1791 that the “Bill of Rights” had been ratified. the “Bill of Rights” originally contained 17 amendments, but only 10 were ratified by 3/4 of the states. Further it was not until 1939 when three of the original 13 colonies (Connecticut, Georgia, and Massachusetts) finally ratified the amendments

With exception of two instances, the Constitution is silent on the subject of religion. The first instance, in Article VI, is a proscription of any religious tests as a requisite public service. The second instance is in the First Amendment of the “Bill of Rights.”

The First Amendment specifically prohibits the establishment of any national religion [known as the Establishment Clause], and also prohibits any government interference with a person's right to exercise his/her choice of religion [known as the Free Exercise Clause].

Since our nation's founding, Americans have been debating where to draw the line between religion and government. Although the First Amendment prohibits government interference, the Supreme Court (SCOTUS) has stepped into the quagmire of religious freedom by upholding the laws referencing polygamy and the use of psychedelic and other drugs in the practice of religion. SCOTUS has also ruled on religious symbols on public property, prayer in public schools and state subsidies for religious schools.

SCOTUS still struggles where to draw the line separating church and state. On the one hand, it has struck down state laws providing for organized prayer in the public schools., but has also upheld laws exempting churches from paying taxes.

While many organizations continue challenging the separation of church and state, we need to remember that while the First Amendment calls for the separation, it does not call for the separation of state from the moral and ethical values of Judeo-Christian teachings. This, IMHO, is where SCOTUS has failed the American public, especially with its finding to remove the 10 Commandments from public buildings and the teaching of religion in public schools.

Constitutionalists believe in interpreting the Constitution in terms of the times it was written. While various documents indicate other religions existed in the country, Christianity was the major religion at the time the "Bill of Rights" was composed by Christians.

If we look at the socialist and communist agendas, we will note that among their goals is the destruction of the moral and ethical fiber of our nation and the family unit. Among their goals is the replacement of God and our freedoms with a worship and support for only the "state."

Your survival and that of our nation relies on you to uphold the moral and ethical teachings that our nation was founded upon. We must reintegrate those teachings into our families, education, and governance at local, state and federal levels.