

Re: Jefferson on the "wall of separation" between church and state

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Thank you Jay. Makes one wonder if those on the Supreme Court need remedial reading classes to improve their comprehension.

Jay Vance wrote:

> *The Danbury Baptist Association, concerned about religious liberty in the new nation wrote to President Thomas Jefferson, Oct. 7, 1801.*

>

> *"Sir, Among the many millions in America and Europe who rejoice in your Election to office; we embrace the first opportunity which we have enjoyd in our collective capacity, since your Inauguration, to express our great satisfaction, in your appointment to the chief Majestracy in the United States; And though our mode of expression may be less courtly 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 ancient charter together with the Laws made coincident therewith, were adopted on the Basis of our government, at the time of our revolution; and such had been our Laws & 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 favors 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 & gain under the pretense of government & Religion should reproach their fellow men -- should reproach their chief Magistrate, as an enemy of religion Law & good order because he will not, dare not assume the prerogatives 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 affect 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 course 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 & the voice of the people
> have cald you to sustain and support you in your Administration against all the
> predetermined opposition of those who wish to rise to wealth & 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.*

>
> *Nehh Dodge
> Ephram Robbins The Committee
> Stephen S. Nelson"*

>
>
> *Baptists in Danbury, Connecticut were persecuted because they were not part of
> the Congregationalist establishment in that state.*

>
> *On January 1, 1802, in response to the letter from the Danbury Baptist
> Association, Thomas Jefferson wrote:*

>
> *"Gentlemen:*

>
> *The affectionate sentiments of esteem and approbation which are so good to
> express towards me, on behalf of the Danbury Baptist Association, give me the
> highest satisfaction. My duties dictate a faithful and 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 and more pleasing.*

>
> *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 the 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. Adhering to this
> expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of
> conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those
> sentiments which tend to restore man to all of his natural rights, convinced he
> has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.*

>
> *I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection and blessings of the common
> Father and Creator of man, and tender you and your religious association,
> assurances of my high respect and esteem.*

- >
- > *Thomas Jefferson*
- >
- > *If you read Jefferson's words in context, the "wall of separation" he's*
- > *referring to is to protect the church FROM THE GOVERNMENT, not the other way*
- > *around. He's not saying that religion has no place in public life, he's saying*
- > *that the neither the government or any other entity has the right to dictate to*
- > *an individual what their religious beliefs must be.*
- >
- > *One phrase of Jefferson's that I find particularly interesting is when he says,*
- > *"the legislative powers of the government reach actions only, and not*
- > *opinions..." How far have we strayed from THAT sentiment! "Hate crime"*
- > *legislation that adds extra penalties for the same crime if the perpetrator*
- > *BELIEVES a certain way about the victim is a perfect example of legislation*
- > *intended to govern THOUGHT and OPINIONS rather than actions.*
- >
- > *Jay*