

From Founding Colonies to the Early Republic: the Slow and Unique Development of the Separation of Church and State

Outline:

1. The Role of Christianity in the founding of the British Colonies in North America
2. The First Great Awakening and the Transformation of American Christianity
3. The Role of Religion in the American Revolution
4. A Separation in the Early Republic

Quotes of Interest:

“I. JAMES, by the Grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c. . . . We would vouchsafe unto them our licence, to make habitation, plantation, and to deduce a colony of sundry of our people into that part of America commonly called Virginia, and other parts and territories in America, either appertaining unto us, or which are not now actually possessed by any christian prince or people. . . .

III. We greatly commending, and graciously accepting of, their desires for the furtherance of so noble a work, which may, by the providence of Almighty God, hereafter tend to the glory of his divine Majesty, in propagating of Christian religion to such people, as yet live in darkness and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God, and may in time bring the infidels and savages, living in those parts, to human civility, and to a settled and quiet government; Do, by these our letters pattents, graciously accept of, and agree to, their humble and well intended desires” Charter of the Virginia Company, 1606.

<https://encyclopediaofvirginia.org/primary-documents/first-charter-of-virginia-1606/>

“The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as his own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways. So that we shall see much more of his wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when he shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, ‘the Lord make it likely that of New England.’ For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and

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a by-word through the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God, and all professors for God's sake. We shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us till wee be consumed out of the good land whither we are a going." John Winthrop, lawyer and future governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, "A Model of Christian Charity," 1630.
<https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/a-model-of-christian-charity-2/>

"As a faithful Ministry is a great Ornament, Blessing, and Comfort, to the Church of God; even the feet of such Messengers are beautiful: So on the contrary, an ungodly Ministry is a great Curse and Judgment: These Caterpillars labor to devour every green Thing. . . . Natural Men have no Call of GOD to the Ministerial Work, under the Gospel-Dispensation. . . . If the Ministry of natural Men be as it has been represented; Then it is both lawful and expedient to go from them to hear Godly Persons. . . . To bind Men to a particular Minister, against their Judgment and Inclinations, when they are more edified elsewhere, is carnal with a Witness; a cruel Oppression of tender Consciences, a Compelling of Men to Sin. . . . And let those who live under the Ministry of dead Men, whether they have got the Form of Religion or not, repair to the Living, where they may be edified." Gilbert Tennent, "On the Dangers of an Unconverted Ministry," 1740. <https://regenerationandrepentance.wordpress.com/2018/09/20/the-danger-of-an-unconverted-ministry/>

"The error seems not sufficiently eradicated, that the operations of the mind, as well as the acts of the body, are subjects to the coercion of the laws. But our rulers can have authority over such natural rights only as we have submitted to them. The rights of conscience we never submitted, we could not submit. We are answerable for them to our God. The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1782. <https://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/2260>

"As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion, -as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Musselmen,-and as the said States never have entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mehomitan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries." "Treaty of Peace and Friendship," Article 11, 1796.
https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/bar1796t.asp#art11