

# Political Figures Talk of Separation, Religious Freedom, and Religion Itself

*The United States presidential election emits a pandemonium of tub-thumping for the Lord. Positive Atheism Magazine responds by offering some gems from our online collection of quotations, affectionately known as Positive Atheism's Big List of Quotes.*

*We do this to show that many political figures throughout our history have had a sense of fairness and an understanding of the United States Constitution. Since this is an election, we deliberately omit the Judicial Branch and concentrate on those who engage in electioneering.*

“the adulterous connection  
of church and state”  
— Thomas Paine

*Sources are given only if the primary source is known to us. Being now a legitimate collection of quotations in our own right, we cite PAM's Big List of Quotes if the only source we have is a collection of quotations or some other secondary writing. This is done in the interest of space. We include no quotations here for which at least a secondary source is unknown to us. All known secondary sources, including collections and other writings, are provided in detail on our web page.*

## REVOLUTIONARY HEROES

### Thomas Paine (U.S., France)

“He who would make his own liberty secure, must guard even his enemy from oppression.”—*PAM's Big List of Quotes*

“When an objection cannot be made formidable, there is some policy in trying to make it frightful; and to substitute the yell and the war-whoop, in the place of reason, argument and good order.”  
—*ibid*

“It is always to be taken for granted, that those who oppose an equality of rights never mean the exclusion should take place on themselves.”—*ibid*

“Toleration is not the opposite of intoleration, but is the counterfeit of it. Both are despotisms. The one assumes to itself the right of withholding liberty

of conscience, and the other of granting it.”—*The Rights of Man*, 1791

“Persecution is not an original feature in any religion; but it is always the strongly marked feature of all religions established by law. Take away the law-establishment, and every religion re-assumes its original benignity.”—*ibid*

“The adulterous connection of church and state.”—*ibid*

“The sublime and the ridiculous are often so nearly related, that it is difficult to class them separately. One step above the sublime makes the ridiculous, and one step above the ridiculous makes the sublime again.”—*The Age of Reason*

“The most detestable wickedness, the most horrid cruelties, and the greatest miseries that have afflicted the human race have had their origin in this thing called revelation, or revealed religion.”  
—*ibid*

### Benjamin Franklin

“When a religion is good, I conceive it will support itself; and when it does not support itself, and God does not take care to support it so that its professors are obliged to call for help of the civil power, 'tis a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one.”—letter to Richard Price, October 9, 1780

“the way to see by faith is  
to shut the eye of reason”  
— Benjamin Franklin

“If we look back into history for the character of the present sects in Christianity, we shall find few that have not in their turns been persecutors, and complainers of persecution. The primitive Christians thought persecution extremely wrong in the pagans, but practiced it on one another. The first Protestants of the Church of England blamed persecution in the Romish Church, but practiced it upon the Puritans. These found it wrong in the bishops, but fell into the same practice themselves both here and in New England.”—*Essay on Toleration*

“The way to see by faith is to shut the eye of reason.”—*Poor Richard's Almanack*, 1758

“where...science has prevailed,  
miracles have ceased”  
— Ethan Allen

“Many a long dispute among divines may be thus abridged: It is so; It is not so. It is so; it is not so.”—*ibid*, 1743

“Revelation had indeed no weight with me.”—*Autobiography*

### Ethan Allen

“In those parts of the world where learning and science has prevailed, miracles have ceased; but in those parts of it as are barbarous and ignorant, miracles are still in vogue.”—*Reason, the Only Oracle of Man*, 1784

“There is not any thing, which has contributed so much to delude mankind in religious matters, as mistaken apprehension concerning supernatural inspiration of revelation.”—*ibid*

“I have generally been denominated a Deist, the reality of which I have never disputed, being conscious that I am not Christian, except mere infant baptism makes me one; and as to being a Deist, I know not, strictly speaking, whether I am one or not.”—*ibid*

### Samuel Adams

“In regard to religion, mutual toleration in the different professions thereof is what all good and candid minds in all ages have ever practiced, and both by precept and example inculcated on mankind.”—*The Rights of the Colonists*

## UNITED STATES PRESIDENTS

### George Washington, 1789-97

“We have abundant reason to rejoice that in this Land the light of truth and reason has triumphed over the power of bigotry and superstition... In this enlightened Age and in this Land of equal liberty it is our boast, that a man's religious tenets will not forfeit the protection

of the Laws, nor deprive him of the right of attaining and holding the highest Offices that are known in the United States.”—letter to the members of the New Church in Baltimore, January 27, 1793

“to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance”  
—George Washington

“It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it was by the indulgence of one class of the people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that those who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it, on all occasions, their effectual support.”—letter to the congregation of Touro Synagogue, Newport, Rhode Island, August, 1790

#### John Adams, 1797-1801

“The United States of America have exhibited, perhaps, the first example of governments erected on the simple principles of nature.... [In] the formation of the American governments... it will never be pretended that any persons employed in that service had interviews with the gods, or were in any degree under the influence of heaven.... These governments were contrived merely by the use of reason and the senses.”—*A Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*, 1788

“I almost shudder at the thought of alluding to the most fatal example of the abuses of grief which the history of mankind has preserved—the Cross. Consider what calamities that engine of grief has produced!”—letter to Thomas Jefferson

“I do not like the reappearance of the Jesuits.... Shall we not have regular swarms of them here, in as many disguises as only a king of the gipsies can assume, dressed as printers, publishers, writers and schoolmasters? If ever there was a body of men who merited damnation on earth and in Hell, it is this society of Loyola’s. Nevertheless, we are compelled by our system of religious toleration to offer them an asylum.”—letter to Thomas Jefferson, May 5, 1816

#### Thomas Jefferson, 1801-09

“Because religious belief, or non-belief, is such an important part of every person’s life, freedom of religion affects every individual. State churches that use government power to support themselves and force their views on persons of other faiths undermine all our civil rights. Moreover, state support of the church tends to make the clergy unresponsive to the people and leads to corruption within religion. Erecting the ‘wall of separation between church and state,’ therefore, is absolutely essential in a free society.

“We have solved... the great and interesting question whether freedom of religion is compatible with order in government and obedience to the laws. And we have experienced the quiet as well as the comfort which results from leaving every one to profess freely and openly those principles of religion which are the inductions of his own reason and the serious convictions of his own inquiries.”—letter to the Virginia Baptists, 1808

“The impious presumption of legislators and rulers, civil as 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.”—*Virginia Act for Religious Freedom*, 1786

“never be pretended that any had interviews with the gods”  
—John Adams

“But it is only proposed that I should *recommend*, not prescribe a day of fasting & prayer. That is, that I should indirectly assume to the U.S. an authority over religious exercises which the Constitution has directly precluded them from.... I do not believe it is for the interest of religion to invite the civil magistrate to direct it’s exercises, it’s discipline, or it’s doctrines; nor of the religious societies that the general government should be invested with the power of effecting any uniformity of time or matter among them. Fasting & prayer are religious exercises. The enjoining them an act of discipline. Every religious

society has a right to determine for itself the times for these exercises, & the objects proper for them, according to their own particular tenets; and this right can never be safer than in their own hands, where the constitution has deposited it. I am aware that the practice of my predecessors may be quoted.... Be this as it may, every one must act according to the dictates of his own reason, & mine tells me that civil powers alone have been given to the President of the U.S. and no authority to direct the religious exercises of his constituents.”—letter to Samuel Miller, January 23, 1808

“What a conspiracy this, between church and state! Sing Tantarara, rogues all, rogues all! Sing Tantarara, rogues all!”—letter to John Cartwright, June 25, 1824

“religious faith... does not give immunity to criminal acts”  
—Thomas Jefferson

“The clergy [wishing to establish their specific form of Christianity]... believe that any portion of power confided to me [as President] will be exerted in opposition to their schemes. And they believe rightly: for I have sworn upon the altar of god, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man. But this is all they have to fear from me: and enough, too, in their opinion.”—letter to Benjamin Rush, 1800 (lowercase “g” in *god* retained)

“The declaration that religious faith shall be unpunished does not give immunity to criminal acts dictated by religious error.”—letter to James Madison

“Difference of opinion is advantageous in religion. The several sects perform the office of a censor morum over each other.”—*Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1781-82

“No man complains of his neighbor for ill management of his affairs, for an error in sowing his land or marrying his daughter, for consuming his substance in taverns.... In all these he has liberty; but if he does not frequent the church, or then conform in ceremonies, there is an immediate uproar.”—*ibid*

“To talk of immaterial existences is to talk of *nothings*. To say that the human soul, angels, god, are immaterial, is to say they are nothings, or that there is no god, no angels, no soul. I cannot reason

otherwise...without plunging into the fathomless abyss of dreams and phantasms. I am satisfied, and sufficiently occupied with the things which are, without tormenting or troubling myself about those which may indeed be, but of which I have no evidence.”—letter to John Adams, August 15, 1820

“The Christian god can easily be pictured as virtually the same god as the many ancient gods of past civilizations. The Christian god is a three headed monster; cruel, vengeful and capricious. If one wishes to know more of this raging, three headed beast-like god, one only needs to look at the caliber of people who say they serve him.”—letter to his nephew, Peter Carr

### James Madison, 1809-17

“Every new and successful example of a perfect separation between ecclesiastical and civil matters is of importance.”—letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822

“perfect separation between ecclesiastical and civil matters”  
—James Madison

“I have no doubt that every new example will succeed, as every past one has done, in shewing that religion and Government will both exist in greater purity the less they are mixed together.”—*ibid*

“Because the bill in reserving a certain parcel of land in the United States for the use of said Baptist Church comprises a principle and a precedent for the appropriation of funds of the United States for the use and support of religious societies, contrary to the article of the Constitution which declares that ‘Congress shall make no law respecting a religious establishment.’”—Veto message, February 28, 1811

“What influence, in fact, have ecclesiastical establishments had on society? In some instances they have been seen to erect a spiritual tyranny on the ruins of the civil authority; in many instances they have been seen upholding the thrones of political tyranny; in no instance have they been the guardians of the liberties of the people. Rulers who wish to subvert the public liberty may have found an established clergy convenient allies.”—*A Memorial and*

*Remonstrance addressed to the Virginia General Assembly, 1785*

“Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity, in exclusion of all other Religions, may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christians, in exclusion of all other Sects?”—*ibid*

### Madison Never Said This:

“We have staked the whole future of American civilization not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future of all our political institutions upon the capacity of mankind for self-government, upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to control ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments.”—This is a *complete fabrication* which has been read into the Congressional Record on at least two occasions during the past ten years. See *PAM’s Big List of Quotes* for details.

### James Monroe, 1817-25

“It is only when the people become ignorant and corrupt, when they degenerate into a populace, that they are incapable of exercising the sovereignty. Usurpation is then an easy attainment, and an usurper soon found. The people themselves become the willing instruments of their own debasement and ruin. Let us, then, look to the great cause, and endeavor to preserve it in full force. Let us by all wise and constitutional measures promote intelligence among the people as the best means of preserving our liberties.”—First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1817

### John Quincy Adams, 1825-29

“Civil liberty can be established on no foundation of human reason which will not at the same time demonstrate the right to religious freedom... The tendency of the spirit of the age is strong toward religious liberty.”—letter to Richard Anderson, May 27, 1823

“might...disturb the security which religion...enjoys”  
—Andrew Jackson

“There is in the clergy of all Christian denominations a time-serving, cringing, subservient morality, as wide from the spirit of the gospel as it is from

the intrepid assertion and vindication of truth.”—diary entry for May 27, 1838

### Andrew Jackson, 1829-37

“I could not do otherwise without transcending the limits prescribed by the Constitution for the President and without feeling that I might in some degree disturb the security which religion nowadays enjoys in this country in its complete separation from the political concerns of the General Government.”—statement refusing to proclaim a national day of fasting and prayer, *PAM’s Big List of Quotes*

“religion and politics should not be mingled”  
—Millard Fillmore

### John Tyler, 1841-45

“Let it be henceforth proclaimed to the world that man’s conscience was created free; that he is no longer accountable to his fellow man for his religious opinions, being responsible therefore only to his God.”—*PAM’s Big List of Quotes*

### James Knox Polk 1845-49

“Thank God, under our Constitution there was no connection between Church and State, and that in my action as President of the United States I recognized no distinction of creeds in my appointments to office.”—*PAM’s Big List of Quotes*

### Millard Fillmore, 1850-53

“I am tolerant of all creeds. Yet if any sect suffered itself to be used for political objects I would meet it by political opposition. In my view church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled.”—address during 1856 Presidential election

### Franklin Pierce, 1853-57

(No direct quotations available.)

“[Franklin Pierce] was a member of the constitutional convention of New Hampshire in 1850. There he made a strenuous right as did John Adams in Massachusetts, to abolish that portion of the State Constitution which made the Protestant Religion the official religion of the Granite State.”—Franklin

Steiner, *The Religious Views of Our Presidents*, 1936, p. 65

**James Buchanan, 1857-61**

“[The Government of the U.S.] possesses no power whatever over the question of religion.”—*PAM’s Big List of Quotes*

“I have seldom met an intelligent person whose views were not narrowed and distorted by religion.”—*ibid*

**Abraham Lincoln, 1861-65**

“The United States government must not undertake to run the Churches. When an individual, in the Church or out of it, becomes dangerous to the public interest he must be checked.”—*PAM’s Big List of Quotes*

“unsoundness of the Christian scheme of salvation”  
—Abraham Lincoln

“If there is no military need for the building, leave it alone, neither putting anyone in or out of it, except on finding some one preaching or practicing treason, in which case lay hands on him, just as if he were doing the same thing in any other building.”—order relating to a church in Memphis, Tennessee, issued on May 13, 1864

“My earlier views of the unsoundness of the Christian scheme of salvation and the human origin of the scriptures, have become clearer and stronger with advancing years and I see no reason for thinking I shall ever change them.”—letter to Judge J. S. Wakefield, after young Willie Lincoln’s death in 1862

“What is to be, will be, and no prayers of ours can arrest the decree.”—quoted by Mary Todd Lincoln in William Herndon’s *Religion of Lincoln*

“It will not do to investigate the subject of religion too closely, as it is apt to lead to Infidelity.”—*Manford’s Magazine*

**Ulysses S. Grant, 1869-77**

“The United States, knowing no distinction of her own citizens on account of religion or nationality, naturally believes in a civilization the world over which will secure the same universal laws.”—letter appointing the U.S. Consul at Bucharest, Rumania, December, 1870

“In 1850, I believe, the church property in the United States, which paid no

tax, amounted to \$87 million. In 1900, without a check, it is safe to say, this property will reach a sum exceeding \$3 billion. I would suggest the taxation of all property equally.”—*PAM’s Big List of Quotes*

“not one dollar...to the support of any sectarian schools”  
—Ulysses S. Grant

“I would like to call your attention to ...an evil that, if allowed to continue, will probably lead to great trouble.... It is the accumulation of vast amounts of untaxed church property.”—*ibid*

“Encourage free schools and resolve that not one dollar appropriated for their support shall be appropriated to the support of any sectarian schools. Resolve that neither the state nor nation, nor both combined, shall support institutions of learning other than those sufficient to afford every child growing up in the land of opportunity of a good common school education, unmixed with sectarian, pagan, or atheistical dogmas. Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the church and the private school supported entirely by private contributions. Keep the church and state forever separate.”—address to the Army of Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, September 25, 1875

**Rutherford B. Hayes, 1877-81**

“We all agree that neither the Government nor political parties ought to interfere with religious sects. It is equally true that religious sects ought not to interfere with the Government or with political parties. We believe that the cause of good government and the cause of religion suffer by all such interference.”—statement as Governor of Ohio, 1875

“sects ought not to interfere with...political parties”  
—Rutherford B. Hayes

**James Abram Garfield, 1881**

“Next in importance to freedom and justice is popular education, without which neither justice nor freedom can be permanently maintained. Its interests are intrusted to the States and the voluntary action of the people. Whatever

help the nation can justly afford should be generously given to aid the States in supporting common schools; but it would be unjust to our people and dangerous to our institutions to apply any portion of the revenues of the nation or of the States to the support of sectarian schools. The separation of Church and State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute.”—letter of acceptance, presidential nomination, July, 1880

“In my judgment, while it is the duty of Congress to respect to the uttermost the conscientious convictions and religious scruples of every citizen...not any ecclesiastical organization can be safely permitted to usurp in the smallest degree the functions and powers of the national government.”—Inaugural Address, March 4, 1881

**Grover Cleveland, 1885-89, 1893-97**

“I know that human prejudice—especially that growing out of race and religion—is cruelly inveterate and lasting.”—*PAM’s Big List of Quotes*

**Theodore Roosevelt, 1901-09**

“I hold that in this country there must be complete severance of Church and State; that public moneys shall not be used for the purpose of advancing any particular creed; and therefore that the public schools shall be nonsectarian and no public moneys appropriated for sectarian schools.”—October 12, 1915

“no public moneys appropriated for sectarian schools”  
—Theodore Roosevelt

“To discriminate against a thoroughly upright citizen because he belongs to some particular church, or because, like Abraham Lincoln, he has not avowed his allegiance to any church, is an outrage against that liberty of conscience which is one of the foundations of American life.”—letter to J. C. Martin, November 9, 1908

“If there is one thing for which we stand in this country, it is for complete religious freedom, and it is an emphatic negation of this right to cross-examine a man on his religion before being willing to support him for office.”—*ibid*

“I believe that this Republic will endure for many centuries. If so there will doubtless be among its Presidents

Protestants and Catholics, and very probably at some time, Jews. I have consistently tried while President to act in relation to my fellow Americans of Catholic faith as I hope that any future President who happens to be Catholic will act towards his fellow Americans of Protestant faith. Had I followed any other course I should have felt that I was unfit to represent the American people.”—*ibid*

“Because we are unqualifiedly and without reservation against any system of denominational schools, maintained by the adherents of any creed with the help of state aid, therefore, we as strenuously insist that the public schools shall be free from sectarian influences, and above all, free from any attitude of hostility to the adherents of any particular creed.”—*PAM’s Big List of Quotes*

### **William Howard Taft, 1909-13**

“There is nothing so despicable as a secret society that is based upon religious prejudice and that will attempt to defeat a man because of his religious beliefs. Such a society is like a cockroach—it thrives in the dark. So do those who combine for such an end.”—address, December 20, 1914

“I do not believe in the divinity of Christ, and there are many other of the postulates of the orthodox creed to which I cannot subscribe.”—letter to Yale University, on turning down an offer for its presidency

### **Woodrow Wilson, 1913-21**

“It does not become America that within her borders, where every man is free to follow the dictates of his conscience, men should raise the cry of church against church. To do that is to strike at the very spirit and heart of America.”—address, November 4, 1915

“I do not believe in  
the divinity of Christ”  
—William Howard Taft

“May it not suffice for me to say... that of course like every other man of intelligence and education I do believe inorganic evolution. It surprises me that at this late date such questions should be raised.”—letter to an academic, August 29, 1922

### **Warren G. Harding, 1921-23**

“In the experiences of a year of the Presidency, there has come to me no other such unwelcome impression as the manifest religious intolerance which exists among many of our citizens. I hold it to be a menace to the very liberties we boast and cherish.”—address, March 24, 1922

“the mind of America  
must be forever free”  
—Calvin Coolidge

### **Calvin Coolidge, 1923-29**

“We cannot permit any inquisition either within or without the law or apply any religious test to the holding of office. The mind of America must be forever free.”—Inaugural Address, March 4, 1925

### **Herbert Clark Hoover, 1929-33**

“I come of Quaker stock. My ancestors were persecuted for their beliefs. Here they sought and found religious freedom. By blood and conviction I stand for religious tolerance both in act and in spirit.”—*New Day*, 1928, p. 36

### **Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1933-45**

“The lessons of religious toleration—a toleration which recognizes complete liberty of human thought, liberty of conscience—is one which, by precept and example, must be inculcated in the hearts and minds of all Americans if the institutions of our democracy are to be maintained and perpetuated.

“We must recognize the fundamental rights of man. There can be no true national life in our democracy unless we give unqualified recognition to freedom of religious worship and freedom of education.”—letter to the Calvert Associates, 1937

### **Harry S. Truman, 1945-53**

“We have gone a long way toward civilization and religious tolerance, and we have a good example in this country. Here the many Protestant denominations, the Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church do not seek to destroy one another in physical violence just because they do not interpret every verse of the Bible in exactly the same way. Here we now have the freedom of all religions, and I hope that never again

will we have a repetition of religious bigotry, as we have had in certain periods of our own history. There is no room for that kind of foolishness here.”  
—*Mr. Citizen*, 1960, pp. 98-99

### **John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 1961-63**

“If my church attempted to influence me in a way which was improper or which affected adversely my responsibilities as a public servant sworn to uphold the Constitution, then I would reply to them that this was an improper action on their part. It was one to which I could not subscribe.”—Press conference, Houston, Texas, September 12, 1960

Whatever one’s religion in his private life may be, for the officeholder, nothing takes precedence over his oath to uphold the Constitution and all its parts—including the First Amendment and the strict separation of church and state.—interview, *Look*, March 3, 1959,

“society...embraces wide varieties of belief and disbelief”  
—John F. Kennedy

“I am flatly opposed to appointment of an ambassador to the Vatican. Whatever advantages it might have in Rome—and I’m not convinced of these—they would be more than offset by the divisive effect at home.”—*ibid*

“It is my firm belief that there should be separation of church and state as we understand it in the United States—that is, that both church and state should be free to operate, without interference from each other in their respective areas of jurisdiction. We live in a liberal, democratic society which embraces wide varieties of belief and disbelief. There is no doubt in my mind that the pluralism which has developed under our Constitution, providing as it does a framework within which diverse opinions can exist side by side and by their interaction enrich the whole, is the most ideal system yet devised by man. I cannot conceive of a set of circumstances which would lead me to a different conclusion.”—letter to Glenn Archer, February 23, 1959

“Voters are more than Catholics, Protestants or Jews. They make up their minds for many diverse reasons, good and bad. To submit the candidates to a religious test is unfair enough—to apply it to the voters is divisive, degrading and

wholly unwarranted.”—address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, April 21, 1960

“I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute—where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be Catholic) how to act and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote—where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference—and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.

“I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish—where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches, or any other ecclesiastical source—where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials—and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all.”—address to the Ministerial Association of Greater Houston, September 12, 1960

#### **Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1963-69**

“I believe in the American tradition of separation of church and state which is expressed in the First Amendment to the Constitution. By my office—and by personal conviction—I am sworn to uphold that tradition.”—interview, *Baptist Standard*, October, 1964

#### **Jimmy Carter, 1977-81**

“I believe in the separation of church and state and would not use my authority to violate this principle in any way.”—letter to Jack Harwell, August 11, 1977

“the government ought to stay out of the prayer business”  
—Jimmy Carter

“The government ought to stay out of the prayer business.”—Press Conference, 1979, Washington, D.C.

#### **Bill Clinton, 1993 to present**

“We don’t need a constitutional amendment for kids to pray.”—at the presidential debate in San Diego, 1996

“the religion clauses... do not need to be fixed”  
—Walter Mondale

#### **U.S. VICE-PRESIDENT**

##### **Walter Mondale, 1977-81**

“Today, the religion clauses of the First Amendment do not need to be fixed; they need to be followed.”—address to B’nai B’rith, Washington, D.C., September 6, 1984

“The Queen of England is Defender of the Faith but the President of the United States is Defender of the Constitution, which defends all faiths.”—*ibid*

“Whatever his private beliefs and religious practice, a president must be the guardian of the laws which ensure America’s religious diversity.”—*ibid*

#### **U.S. GOVERNORS**

##### **DeWitt Clinton, New York**

In this country there is no alliance between church and state, no established religion, no tolerated religion—for toleration results from establishment—but religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution and consecrated by the social compact.—1813, *PAM’s Big List of Quotes*

##### **Al Smith, New York**

“I believe in absolute freedom of conscience for all men and equality of all churches, all sects and all beliefs before the law as a matter of right and not as a matter of favor. I believe in the absolute separation of church and state and in the strict enforcement of the Constitution that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof I believe that no tribunal of any church has any power to make any decree of any force in the law of the land, other than to establish the status of its own communicants within its own church.”—*Atlantic Monthly*, April, 1927

“I believe in the support of the public school as one of the cornerstones of American liberty. I believe in the right of every parent to choose whether his child shall be educated in the public school or in a religious school supported by those of his own faith.”—*ibid*

“I can think of no greater disaster to this country than to have the voters of it divide upon religious lines.”—address, Oklahoma City, September 20, 1928

##### **Nelson Rockefeller, New York**

“I do not believe it right for one group to impose its vision of morality on an entire society.”—Veto message, May 13, 1972. Rockefeller vetoed a bill to repeal New York’s 1970 abortion law.

##### **Mario Cuomo, New York**

“The American people need no course in philosophy or political science or church history to know that God should not be made into a celestial party chairman. To most of us, the manipulative invoking of religion to advance a politician or a party is frightening and divisive. The American people will tolerate religious leaders taking positions for or against candidates... But the American people are leery about large religious organizations, powerful churches, or synagogue groups engaging in such activities—again, not as a matter of law or doctrine, but because our innate wisdom and democratic instinct teaches us these things are dangerous.”—address, University of Notre Dame, September 13, 1984

“God should not be made into a celestial party chairman”  
—Mario Cuomo

“Way down deep the American people are afraid of an entangling relationship between formal religions—or whole bodies of religious belief—and government. Apart from constitutional law and religious doctrine, there is a sense that tells us it’s wrong to presume to speak for God or to claim God’s sanction of our particular legislation and his rejection of all other positions. Most of us are offended when we see religion being trivialized by its appearance in political throw-away pamphlets.”—*ibid*

##### **Lowell Weicker, Connecticut**

“The time has come to knock off this religion business in American politics. There’s no end to the mischief that can occur. It is like putting nitroglycerine in a Waring blender.”—*Remarks*, August 1984

“The United States is not a Christian nation. It is a great nation with Christians, among others, in it. But our greatness is based on the fact that there is no official religion.”—*PAM’s Big List of Quotes*

“That wall, embodied in the First Amendment, is perhaps America’s most important contribution to political progress on this planet.”—*Free Inquiry*, Summer, 1983

“the United States is  
not a Christian nation”  
—Lowell Weicker

#### Jesse Ventura, Minnesota

Ventura: “See, we call our country home of the brave and land of the free, but it’s not. We give a false portrayal of freedom. We’re not free—if we were, we’d allow people their freedom. Prohibiting something doesn’t make it go away. Prostitution is criminal, and bad things happen because it’s run illegally by dirtbags who are criminals. If it’s legal, then the girls could have health checks, unions, benefits, anything any other worker gets, and it would be far better.”

Playboy: “This isn’t a very popular position in America, is it?”

Ventura: “No, and it’s because of religion. Organized religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers. It tells people to go out and stick their noses in other people’s business. I live by the golden rule: Treat others as you’d want them to treat you. The Religious Right wants to tell people how to live.”—*Playboy*, November, 1999

#### OTHER POLITICAL FIGURES

##### Wendell Wilkie (U.S.)

“I am not interested in the support of anybody who stands for any form of prejudice as to anybody’s race or religion. I don’t want it. I have no place in my philosophy for such beliefs. I don’t have to be President of the United States but I do have to live with myself.”—rejecting endorsement of anti-Semitic *Social Justice* magazine, August 27, 1940

##### Barry Goldwater (U.S.)

“Being a conservative in America traditionally has meant that one holds a deep, abiding respect for the Constitution. We conservatives believe sincerely in the integrity of the Constitution. We treasure the freedom that document protects....

“By maintaining the separation of church and state, the United States has

avoided the intolerance which has so divided the rest of the world with religious wars. Throughout our two hundred plus years, public policy debate has focused on political and economic issues, on which there can be compromise....

“The great decisions of government cannot be dictated by the concerns of religious factions. This was true in the days of Madison, and it is just as true today. We have succeeded for 205 years in keeping the affairs of state separate from the uncompromising idealism of religious groups and we mustn’t stop now. To retreat from that separation would violate the principles of conservatism and the values upon which the framers built this democratic republic.”—U.S. Senate, September 16, 1981

##### Sargent Shriver (U.S.)

“I believe strongly in the Constitutional principle of separating church and state. Our founders were right in fearing that religious freedom would be threatened in the long run by a departure from governmental neutrality in spiritual matters.”—address, New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, Washington, D.C., January 1976

##### Geraldine Ferraro (U.S.)

“Personal religious convictions have no place in political campaigns or in dictating public policy.”—*Ferraro: My Story*

“We are a religious nation because we do not have a state religion, because the government guarantees freedom of religion but has no role in religion, because not only do we tolerate our religious differences, we celebrate them.”—*ibid*

##### Bill Bradley (U.S.)

“The only way to be true to our American tradition is to maintain absolute governmental neutrality regarding religious beliefs and practices.”—letter to Herbert Schapiro, June 27, 1990

“absolute neutrality regarding  
religious...practices”  
—Bill Bradley

##### Robert Ingersoll (U.S.)

“Our civilization is not Christian. It does not come from the skies. It is not a result of ‘inspiration.’ It is the child

of invention, of discovery, of applied knowledge—that is to say, of science. When man becomes great and grand enough to admit that all have equal rights; when thought is untrammelled; when worship shall consist in doing useful things; when religion means the discharge of obligations to our fellowmen, then, and not until then, will the world be civilized.”—“Reply To The Indianapolis Clergy” *The Iconoclast*, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1882

“no lower opinion of the human  
race has ever been expressed”  
—Robert Ingersoll

“Christianity has such a contemptible opinion of human nature that it does not believe a man can tell the truth unless frightened by a belief in God. No lower opinion of the human race has ever been expressed.”—on the practice of not allowing non-Christians to testify in court, *PAM’s Big List of Quotes*

“Some president wishes to be re-elected, and thereupon speaks about the Bible as ‘the corner-stone of American Liberty.’ This sentence is a mouth large enough to swallow any church, and from that time forward the religious people will be citing that remark of the politician to substantiate the inspiration of the Scriptures.”—“Brooklyn Divines,” 1883

“We are satisfied that there can be but little liberty on earth while men worship a tyrant in heaven.”—“The Gods,” 1872

“I admit that reason is a small and feeble flame, a flickering torch by stumblers carried in the star-less night,—blown and flared by passion’s storm,—and yet, it is the only light. Extinguish that, and nought remains.”—from the Field-Ingersoll Debate (part 2): “A Reply To The Rev. Henry M. Field, D.D.”

“Give me the storm and stress of thought and action rather than the dead calm of ignorance and faith. Banish me from Eden when you will but first let me eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.”—*PAM’s Big List of Quotes*

##### Henry Clay (U.S.)

“All religions united with government are more or less inimical to liberty. All, separated from government, are compatible with liberty.”—House of Representatives, March 24, 1818

**Edward M. Kennedy (U.S.)**

“People of faith should not invoke the power of the state to decide what everyone can believe or think or read or do. In such cases, like abortion or prayer or prohibition or sexual identity, the proper role of religion is to appeal to the free conscience of each person, not the coercive rule of secular law.”—address, Jerry Falwell’s Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia, October 3, 1983

“I believe...religious witness should not mobilize public authority to impose a view where a decision is inherently private in nature or where people are deeply divided about whether it is.”—address, National Religious Broadcasters, February 4, 1985

**Thomas Macaulay (Great Britain)**

“To punish a man because he has committed a crime, or because he is believed, though unjustly, to have committed a crime, is not persecution. To punish a man, because we infer from the nature of some doctrine which he holds, or from the conduct of other persons who hold the same doctrines with him, that he will commit a crime, is persecution, and is, in every case, foolish and wicked.”—“Hallam’s Constitutional History,” in *Edinburgh Review*, Sept. 1828

“The Puritan hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators.”—*History of England*, 1848, vol. 1, chap. 2

“without free speech no search for truth is possible”  
— Charles Bradlaugh

**Charles Bradlaugh (England)**

“Without free speech no search for truth is possible...no discovery of truth is useful... Better a thousand-fold abuse of free speech than denial of free speech. The abuse dies in a day but denial stays the life of the people and entombs the race.” — *PAM’s Big List of Quotes*

**Edmund Burke (England)**

“Religious persecution may shield itself under the guise of a mistaken and overzealous piety.”—17 February 1788

**Alexis de Tocqueville (France)**

“You need not value it yourself if you do not wish to; but you ought to allow it to us who do value it.” (*Ne me demandez*

*pas d’analyser ce goût sublime, il faut l’éprouver.*)—*Ancien Régime*, III. iii

## POLITICAL ACTIVISTS

**Matilda Joslyn Gage**

“The careful student of history will discover that Christianity has been of very little value in advancing civilization, but has done a great deal toward retarding it.”—*Woman, Church and State*, 1893

“Christianity has been of little value in advancing civilization”  
— Matilda Joslyn Gage

**Helen H. Gardener**

“It is thought strange and particularly shocking by some persons for a woman to question the absolute correctness of the Bible. She is supposed to be able to go through this world with her eyes shut, and her mouth open wide enough to swallow Jonah and the Garden of Eden without making a wry face.... Of all human beings, a woman should spurn the Bible first.”—*Men, Women and Gods*, pp. 1, 24

**Susan B. Anthony**

“The religious persecution of the ages has been done under what was claimed to be the command of God.”—1896, *PAM’s Big List of Quotes*

“I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do because I notice it always coincides with their own desires.”—1896, *ibid*

**Barry Hankins**

“As recently as the early 1980s Jerry Falwell insisted repeatedly that he believed in the separation of church and state.... Falwell’s situation was akin to that of the 1950s and 1960s when left-wing political activists found it necessary to say that they really were good Democrats and not communists. In other words, separation of church and state was akin to mom, baseball, and apple pie—so thoroughly American that even those seeking significant changes in church-state law started by professing their allegiance to the ideal.”—*Liberty*

**Eleanor Roosevelt**

“I do not want church groups controlling the schools of our country. They must remain free.”—*My Day*, July 8, 1949

“Anyone who knows history will recognize that the domination of education or of government by any one particular religious faith is never a happy arrangement for the people.”—letter to Cardinal Spellman, July 23, 1949

“The kind of propaganda that some of the religious groups, aided and abetted by the opposition, put forth in that campaign [1928] utterly disgusted me. If I needed anything to show me what prejudice can do to the intelligence of human beings that campaign was the best lesson I could have had.”—*Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt*, 1961, p. 148

“The separation of church and state is extremely important to any of us who holds to the original traditions of our nation. To change these traditions by changing our traditional attitude toward public education would be harmful to our whole attitude of tolerance in the religious area. If we look at situations which have arisen in the past in Europe and other world areas, I think we will see the reasons why it is wise to hold to our early traditions.”—*New York World-Telegram*, June 23, 1949

“I do not want church groups controlling the schools”  
— Eleanor Roosevelt

**Martha Kegel**

“The proponents of scientific creationism are trying to sneak religion into the public schools.... The fact remains that creationism is a Bible story and teaching it as a science in public schools violates the rights of religious minorities.”—Interview, *Hammond* (Louisiana) *Daily Star*, December 3, 1981

**Madalyn Murray O’Hair**

“Actually, I don’t like Atheists very much—at least most of them—because they are not motivated to move into the community and attempt to correct the injustices which are everywhere apparent against them.”—Radio Address #151

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