Once And For All!

By Pastor John McWilliams

This article is a presentation of the issue, which over the years has come to be commonly called “The Doctrine of Separation of Church and State.” I put those words in quotation marks, because as such, they do not exist in The U. S. Constitution, in spite of the fact that many people would argue they do. Christians especially can use this article to be better versed on this subject and be better equipped to discuss this issue with others. It's fair to say that many, if not most Americans today, including a fair number of Christians, have adopted the widely held “modern day” position on this subject; namely that The U. S. Constitution makes a clear case that The Church should have absolutely nothing at all to do with government. However, a look at the facts bears out that this “modern day” interpretation of The U. S. Constitution is actually very different from the position that was held by the founding fathers and the majority of the people who founded our nation.

If you would like a deeper, more detailed and scholarly look at the subject, you really should read “Kingdoms In Conflict” by Chuck Colson. In his book, Colson does a masterful job of detailing specific court cases and events that have taken place over time, which have drastically changed what the founding fathers of our nation felt with regard to this subject of Church and state.

I find, for the most part, that those today who take the “modern day” position that religion should have absolutely nothing to do with government, have often never really studied the historical facts, and are fairly uninformed on the position of the founders of our nation with regard to this issue.

When one does do their homework on this subject, one first finds that the phrase, "Separation of Church and State" cannot be found anywhere in The U.S. Constitution. The original U. S. Constitution, before it had any amendments, was written in 1787 and was ratified on June 21, 1788. It went into effect on the first Wednesday of March in 1789. When people today use the phrase, "Separation of Church and State" they are referring to one section of The First Amendment to The U. S. Constitution. We'll get to that in a minute.

The First Amendment was the first of ten amendments to The U. S. Constitution, which were sent to the states on Sept. 25, 1789 for ratification. Those first ten amendments are commonly known today as "The Bill of Rights," and were ratified in 1791.
So after doing the math, one can see that for 12 years, our new country functioned with nothing but The Declaration of Independence and The Articles of Confederation. Then in 1787, the original U. S. Constitution was written which was approved in 1788. The next year on September 25, 1789, the first ten amendments to The U. S. Constitution were written and sent to the states to be ratified. The ratification process was completed on December 15, 1791 and the first ten amendments were added to the constitution. Over the years, 17 more amendments have been ratified by the states and added to our Constitution.

The First Amendment reads as follows.

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

Although the words “Separation of Church and State” are not found in The First Amendment, those words have been coined to describe one of the things people see The First Amendment being designed to do. One thing it was certainly designed to do was to keep Church and state separate in appropriate ways, but as you'll see, it was never designed to enforce complete separation of Church and state. In fact the main concern of the writers of The First Amendment with regard to religion, was to insert something in The U. S. Constitution which would assure that the state never infringed too much on The Church, rather than the other way around.

With regard to religion, what The First Amendment simply was designed to do was to assure that the government through Congress, would never make a law, which would officially give government approval and sanction to a particular religion. They were trying to avoid the scenario that could confer on a particular religion the status of “official religion” of the country. The founders had dealt with that problem in England with The Church Of England being granted such a special status.

Moreover, and perhaps more important, one should clearly also notice what the amendment does not say. It does not say that religion and government should never have anything to do with each another and that they should forever be completely separate. It does not say that prayer in schools, or prayer before and during government functions should be considered unconstitutional.

In fact, nothing could be further from the original intention of the founders. If you read what the original signers of The U. S. Constitution themselves said at the close of the document, they clearly believed in God and were willing to name Him in the document they drafted and ratified. Take a look for yourself.
Done in convention by the unanimous consent of the states present the seventeenth day of September in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty seven and of the independence of the United States of America the twelfth. In witness whereof We have hereunto subscribed our Names,

G. Washington-Preside. and deputy from Virginia

New Hampshire: John Langdon, Nicholas Gilman

Massachusetts: Nathaniel Gorham, Rufus King

Connecticut: Wm: Saml. Johnson, Roger Sherman

New York: Alexander Hamilton

New Jersey: Wil: Livingston, David Brearly, Wm. Paterson, Jona: Dayton


Virginia: John Blair—, James Madison Jr.


South Carolina: J. Rutledge, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, Charles Pinckney, Pierce Butler

Georgia: William Few, Abr Baldwin

It should also be noted that in The Declaration of Independence, the authors clearly mentioned their faith in God with the words that are written below which are familiar to most Americans.

“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.”

Later in the document one sees God mentioned again in the closing section, printed below.
“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.”

By what they wrote they were clearly relying on God as a nation and expected His Divine Blessings in their lives as they followed Him.

Now comes the big question! Are we really to believe that from the time of the signing of The Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the ratification of The Constitution in 1788, to the writing of the First Amendment in 1789, a total of 12 short years, many of the same founders, felt that what they had written about God in both The Declaration of Independence and the main body of The Constitution, was now so wrong that they had to undo it by writing what they did about religion in The First Amendment?

More important, if in fact The First Amendment was intended to make sure government officials kept religion completely out of government, as those who hold the “modern day” view of this subject claim, the record shows that the actions of most all of those very same founders and presidents and government officials for years afterwards, clearly violated the very amendment which they themselves approved. One has to admit that would make very little sense at all.

There are in fact, pages and pages of prayers written by our Presidents and other statesmen of our nation, which if used today the way they were used then, would be considered inappropriate and unconstitutional, based on the current, “modern day” view and interpretation of our nation’s constitution regarding the appropriate separation of Church and state. Our founders and presidents for years, specifically, regularly and purposely wrote prayers for the people of The U.S. They themselves prayed and had prayer offered at various functions and events of government. Why in the world would they do such a thing, if in fact they understood The First Amendment to mean that Church and state must be completely separate? If The First Amendment was supposed to completely separate Church and state, putting “In God We Trust” on our coins and courtroom walls would have surely been seen as unconstitutional by these astute men. Prayer by presidents and other government officials would have been clearly seen as a violation of The First Amendment. Yet, somehow it never was, which says quite a bit about the original intent of those who wrote it and those who lived under it for years to follow.

Below are some of many examples of what I’m talking about. If you would like to see more you can go to the website www.Presidentialprayerteam.net where such examples are constantly researched and shared for all to see.
“Providence has given our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as privilege and interest, of a Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.” John Jay, First U. S. Supreme Court Chief Justice

“Those people who will not be governed by God will be ruled by tyrants.” William Penn

“Before any man can be considered a member of civil society, he must be considered a subject of the Governor of the Universe. And to the same Divine Author of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17) we are indebted for all those privileges and advantages . . . which are so richly enjoyed in this favored land.” President James Madison

“[We] have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion . . . Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” John Adams

“The Bible . . . is the one supreme source of revelation of the meaning of life, the nature of God and spiritual nature and needs of men. It is the only guide of life which really leads the spirit in the way of peace and salvation. America was born a Christian nation. America was born to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of Holy Scripture.” President Woodrow Wilson

Below is a copy of President George Washington’s Thanksgiving Proclamation which began the holiday of Thanksgiving in our nation. It is filled with references to God by the President of the United States. He in fact, was declaring a holiday based clearly on God and His Providence. It was written just 8 days after The First Amendment was sent to the states to be ratified. Being fully aware of and agreeing with what The First Amendment said, President Washington still wrote his proclamation, obviously never feeling it was a violation of The Constitution. I dare say that were a president to write a similar thing today, they would be accused of walking all over The First Amendment.

“Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor-and Whereas both houses of Congress have by their joint committee requested me to recommend to the people of the United States a day of publick thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God, especially a form of government for their safety and happiness.
Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these states to be the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is or that will be—that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks—for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation—for the signal and manifold mercies and the favorable interposition of His providence, which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war—for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed—for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one not lately instituted—for civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge, and in general for all the great and various favors which He hath been pleased to confer upon us.

And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of nations, and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions—to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually—to render our national Government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a government of wise, just and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed—to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations (especially such as have shown kindnesses to us) and to bless them with good government, peace and concord. To promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us—and generally to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best.

Given under my hand at the City of New York the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789."

Some years later, in 1863, President Lincoln, wrote two proclamations. On March 30, 1863 he called for a national day of prayer, fasting and humiliation on the part of all citizens of the country. Then in the same year he wrote a proclamation calling for Thanksgiving Day to be celebrated on the last Thursday of November of that year. Again, were these kinds of proclamations to come from the pen of a sitting president of the United States today, it would cause a tremendous uproar of protest from those who obviously see The First Amendment in a very different light than did President Lincoln. It seems President Lincoln also never felt he was violating The First Amendment by what he proclaimed. Read for yourself what was written.
A Proclamation

Whereas, the Senate of the United States, devoutly recognizing the Supreme Authority and just Government of Almighty God, in all the affairs of men and of nations, has, by a resolution, requested the President to designate and set apart a day for National prayer and humiliation.

And whereas it is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.

And, insomuch as we know that, by His divine law, nations like individuals are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war, which now desolates the land, may be but a punishment, inflicted upon us, for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole People? We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!

It behooves us then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.

Now, therefore, in compliance with the request, and fully concurring in the views of the Senate, I do, by this my proclamation, designate and set apart Thursday, the 30th. day of April, 1863, as a day of national humiliation, fasting and prayer. And I do hereby request all the People to abstain, on that day, from their ordinary secular pursuits, and to unite, at their several places of public worship and their respective homes, in keeping the day holy to the Lord, and devoted to the humble discharge of the religious duties proper to that solemn occasion.

All this being done, in sincerity and truth, let us then rest humbly in the hope authorized by the Divine teachings, that the united cry of the Nation will be heard on high, and answered with blessings, no less than the pardon of our national sins, and the restoration of our now divided and suffering Country, to its former happy condition of unity and peace.
In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this thirtieth day of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty seventh.

A Proclamation.

The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God. In the midst of a civil war of unequaled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign States to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict; while that theatre has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union. Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defence, have not arrested the plough, the shuttle or the ship; the axe has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battle-field; and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.

No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy. It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American People.

I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens.
And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this Third day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the Eighty-eighth.

With all due respect, I would suggest that anyone who makes a case for completely separating Church and state, and does so feeling they are keeping with the original intent of the framers of our nation’s government has not done their homework on this issue. Rather they have fallen for a revisionist position of history designed to support a modern day agenda which was never shared by our founders. They might be compared to the folks who, in spite of all the evidence, still feel we never really landed on the moon and that it was all done with smoke and mirrors in some secret movie studio somewhere.

Those who hold “modern day” interpretations of The First Amendment would have much more integrity if they would simply fess up and admit that what the founders intended and wrote is different than what they would like to see for our country today. They should stop trying to make what the founders wrote agree with their modern day interpretation of The Constitution. They should come clean and be honest enough to say that they simply disagree with what the founders wrote, rather than trying to bend what the founders wrote to agree with them.

However, to do so means one must actually admit that their modern day agenda, as much as they have a right to espouse it, is very different from what the founders of our nation ever had envisioned while writing The Constitution. They should simply admit that what they desire now, is in fact, in conflict with what the framers of The Constitution originally intended and go from there making their case for change.
You can’t have it both ways, for if the founders were right, the “modern day” view is wrong and if the “modern day” view is correct, than the founders were sadly mistaken and should in fact be corrected by the more enlightened citizens of today. If the “modern day” view is correct, than we should get rid of every reference to God, including His Name in The U. S. Constitution itself and be done with it. We should declare that our founders were shortsighted and their obvious dependence on God in private life, as nice as that may have been for them, should never have been transferred to their public offices and to do so poses a serious threat to the government of the country itself.

As you may be aware, we have recently seen controversy in our nation over whether The Ten Commandants should be in public display in government buildings. We have also witnessed a case being heard by The U. S. Supreme Court with regard to whether the phrase “one nation under God” should be taken out of the Pledge of Allegiance To The Flag. Once again, doing one’s homework makes a lot of difference. Those who feel The Ten Commandants, should never be displayed on government property for instance, are in fact, dramatically out of step with the founders as the following information indicates.

The Ten Commandments are depicted in three locations on The Supreme Court Building. There is a big oak door separating the courtroom from the central hallway where The Ten Commandments are depicted alone.

As you walk up the steps to the building which houses The U. S. Supreme Court you can see over the East Pediment of The Supreme Court, near the top of the building a row of the world’s law givers and each one is facing a person in the middle who is facing forward with a full frontal view. The person in the middle is Moses and he is holding The Ten Commandments. Interestingly enough, the Chief Justice’s offices are directly behind this portico.

As you sit inside the courtroom, you can see on the wall, right above where The Supreme Court judges sit, a display of The Ten Commandments.

There are Bible verses etched in stone all over the Federal Buildings and Monuments in Washington, D. C.

You should look at the fourth verse of “The Star Spangled Banner” which is still today the official national anthem of our nation. God and Heaven are mentioned a total of 3 times in the one verse. That certainly fails to fit with a “modern day” interpretation of The First Amendment. Yet when Congress made it our official national anthem, they obviously were fine with it. Perhaps Congress should pass a bill deleting the fourth verse of our national anthem telling the American people it is unconstitutional.
James Madison said, “We have staked the whole 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.”

Patrick Henry said, “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.”

President Jimmy Carter said, “You can’t divorce religious belief and public service. I’ve never detected any conflict between God’s will and my political duty. If you violate one you will violate the other.”

President Ronald Reagan said, “Without God there is no virtue because there is no prompting of the conscience. . . without God there is a coarsening of the society; without God democracy will not and cannot endure. . . if we ever forget that we are one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under.”

Speaking of our nation John Adams said it was “grounded on reason, morality and the Christian religion.”

The position that The First Amendment was written to assure that government and Church would never have anything to do with each other and that Christianity should never influence the ways of government is sheer foolishness when held up to the yardstick of the facts of history. Christians should be aware of this history and be able to lovingly and intelligently share this very important history with many who otherwise will simply swallow the distorted facts fed to them today by those who either never really did their homework on this subject, or if they did, are bent on rewriting history to fulfill their modern day agenda.

May The Lord Bless us as a nation which chooses Him as our God.