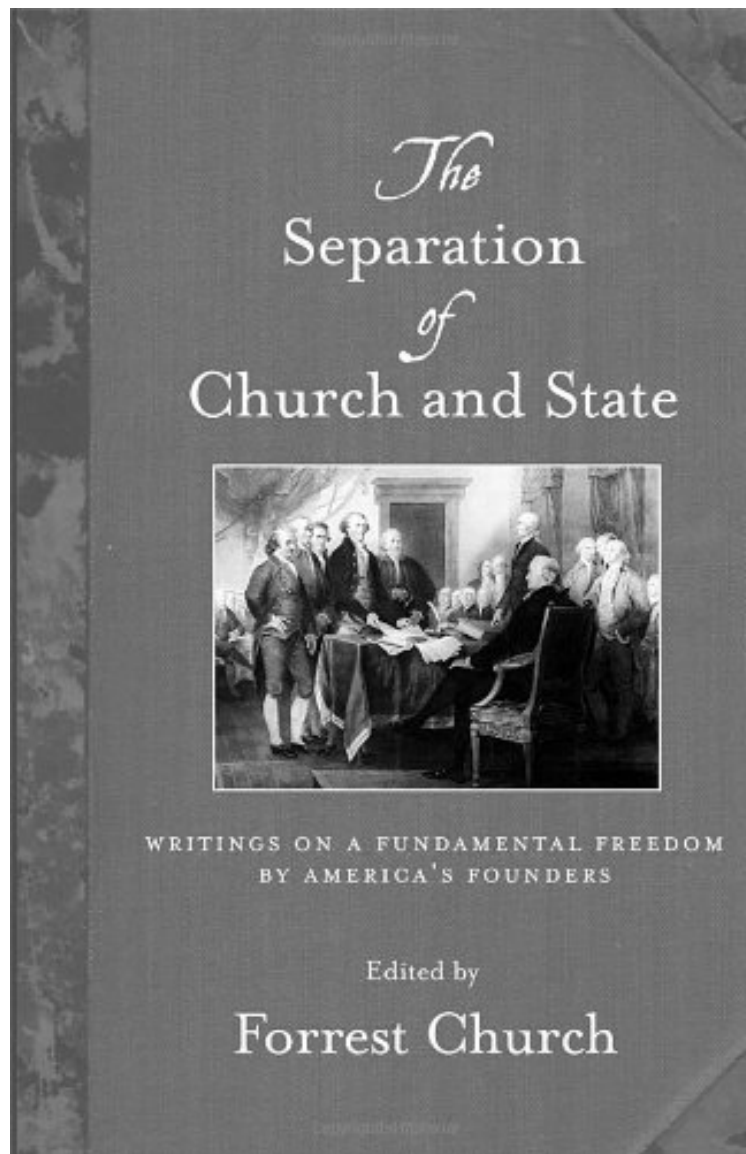


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The Separation of Church and State: Writings on a Fundamental Freedom by America's Founders

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From Beacon Press : The Separation of Church and State: Writings on a Fundamental Freedom by America's Founders before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Separation of Church and State: Writings on a Fundamental Freedom by America's Founders:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Well written, surprising viewpointBy BunsenHoneydewReally one of the most informative and entertaining volumes on this subject. Church is always a thoughtful writer, but his work here is well-researched and detailed. He clearly shows that the people involved in this conversation during the early days of this country were of varied ideologies and backgrounds, and had widely disparate viewpoints (few matching the picture painted by politicians today).1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The Other Side of StoryBy Lance G.I have always been firmly on the pro-religious side of the issue of Separation of Church and State. Because I generally witness those espousing the view that church and state need to be separate as being on the rabid left fringe of society, I never gave any thought to whether or not there was a legitimate reason for wanting this beyond the kook fringe simply wanting to erase all moral controls in order to do whatever they liked in society. I now find that the reason the separation of church and state was designed to prevent the government from dictating religious issues to the churches. That I can buy into. I'm still rather concerned about how our government can function in an overly secular environment, but I've at least modified my view to comprehend that we do need to be mindful that barriers to government intrusion in religious matters need to remain firmly in place.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Wake up AmericaBy Bruce KesslerEvery citizen in the USA should be familiar with the content of this book.

Now in paperback, a primer of essential writings about one of the cornerstones of our democracy by the original authors of the Constitution, edited by preeminent liberal theologian Forrest Church.Americans will never stop debating the question of church-state separation, and such debates invariably lead back to the nations beginnings and the founders intent. The Separation of Church and State presents a basic collection of the founders teachings on this topic. This concise primer gets past the rhetoric that surrounds the current debate, placing the founders vivid writings on religious liberty in historical perspective. Edited and with running commentary by Forrest Church, this important collection informs anyone curious about the original blueprint for our country and its government.

A useful little volume . . . The separation of church and state is important, this collection suggests, because thats how the country was conceived.Jeff Sharlet, *The Revealer* This brief primer includes some of the most eloquent and cogent arguments by Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Adams, George Washington, [and] Patrick Henry that will help a contemporary audience understand the original reasoning behind the separation of church and state.Catholic Opinion No longer will the earnest citizen need to rely on second- and third-hand versions of how separation of church and state came aboutor what it really means. The Separation of Church and State is an invaluable handbook of primary sources for the perplexedand the concernedin todays whirlpool of contrary opinions and strident voices.Edwin S. Gaustad, author of *Proclaim Liberty throughout All the Land: A History of Church and State in America*From the Hardcover edition.About the AuthorForrest Church (19482009) served for almost three decades as senior minister and was minister of public theology at All Souls Unitarian Church in New York City. He wrote or edited twenty-five books, including *Love Death*.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.Introduction One chapter in the saga of our countrys birththe dramatic debate over church-state separation illustrates the founders gathering vision more vividly than almost any other. It spans three decades, from 1772 (with Samuel Adamss broadside linking religious and civil liberty) to 1802 (with Thomas Jeffersons declaration that, in the Bill of Rights, a wall of separation has been built between church and state). Starring several of the new nations leading protagonists, it also sets the tone for their experiment in governance. During the course of this debate, religious liberty becomes the cornerstone of e pluribus unumout of many, one. Arguments over church-state separation didnt end once the language of state and national constitutions was finally hammered out. They continue to this very day, with partisans (from the pulpit to the Oval Office) interpreting the founders and framers actual intent. People ask, should a judge be permitted to express his reverence for religious laws by posting the Ten Commandments in his courtroom? Are faith-based initiatives appropriate when generated out of the White House? Under the Constitution, can state or federal prisoners be organized according to faith and given special privileges for spiritual achievement? Should we restore the Pledge of Allegiance to its original language by removing the phrase under God? Is there a place for any kind of prayer in the public schools? Does church-state separation discriminate against religion, or, to the contrary, is organized religion increasingly trespassing on secular ground? Should marriage rights be extended to all couples, regardless of gender? And, finally, is the lack of any mention of God or Christ in the Constitution intentional, or did the founders assume that everyone understood that the United States of America was a Christian nation? With issues such as these dividing the American people right down the middle, to address them with better justified confidence we must reopen the first chapter of our history. How citizens today view the founders intent is as much a Rorschach test of our personal religious and civic views as it is a true picture of what such men as Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and even George Washington had in mind when they drew up their blueprint for the nation and began building state and federal institutions according to its design. On both the religious right and the secular left, much contemporary confusion stems from an inability to distinguish between: 1) the universal spiritual values that underlie the American experiment in democracy, and 2) the role assigned to government to advance those same values by protecting freedom of conscience and belief. The American Revolution was not driven by the anti-religious pathos that powered the French

Revolution a decade later. In the Declaration of Independence, its draftsman (our most secular founder) emphatically proclaims, We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. Citing as his authority nature and natures God, Thomas Jefferson establishes for liberty and equality a clear metaphysic, grounded in nature itself as part of the Creators plan. The founders professed goal was to establish a nation true to the spirit of divine law, a spirit some understood in Christian terms and others according to the canons of Enlightenment philosophy. These two streams met to affirm the dual imperatives of equality and liberty, best expressed in the above-mentioned motto of e pluribus unum. And the first liberty the founders endeavored to ensure articulating in the First Amendment what already was enshrined in their hearts was religious liberty. Sworn (on the altar of God as Jefferson put it) to protect freedom of conscience, they established a clear line of demarcation between church and state, not to abridge but to fulfill the nations spiritual mandate. One British observer, G. K. Chesterton, memorably defined America as a nation with the soul of a church. His characterization is 100 percent half-right. By the founders design, we embody both the soul of a church and a resolutely secular mind. I tell here the story of how this unique development in the history of governance occurred, highlighting, in their own words, its champions understanding of the essential significance full religious liberty held then and continues to hold for the future of our nation. As was true of the broader American struggle for freedom, the revolution that led to religious liberty was powered by two very different engines: one driven by eighteenth-century Enlightenment values, the other guided by Christian imperatives that grew out of the Great Awakening, a spiritual movement that spread like wildfire across the American colonies throughout the middle decades of that same century. The former movement, emphasizing freedom of conscience as both a political and a philosophical virtue, stressed freedom from the dictates of organized religion. The latter, stemming from a devout reading of the gospels (especially their proclamation of spiritual liberty from bondage to the worlds principalities and powers), demanded freedom for religion. Those who embraced Enlightenment teachings included the men most responsible for drafting our foundational documents (Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, John Jay, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton). And many so-called New Light or Dissident ministers formed what one Tory referred to as the Black Regiment, stirring people up by preaching the gospel of liberty. Together, these seemingly opposite world-views collaborated brilliantly and effectively to establish the separation of church and state in America. Though new in the annals of statecraft, the American experiment in religious liberty was not without foundation, both in British Common Law and Christian Reformation teachings. And certainly the quest for religious freedom was instrumental to early American colonization, beginning with the Pilgrims of Plymouth and the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay, many of whom crossed the Atlantic in order to practice their faith more freely. Nonetheless, Great Britain maintained a church establishment; the leading Reformers replaced long-standing ties between European governments and the Roman Catholic Church with a Protestant church-state connection; and the Puritans, as President Howard Taft once put it, came to this country to establish freedom of their religion, and not the freedom of anybody elses religion. In fact, the first major reform of the church establishment in Massachusetts was imposed by England. In 1684, King James II temporarily revoked Massachusetts royal charter, due to restrictions the Puritans had imposed on their fellow Protestants limiting religious freedom and the right to worship. To receive their charter back, the leaders of the colony had to cede to all Protestants within their jurisdiction the right to worship as they pleased. By the time our chapter in the tale of growing religious freedom in America opens, the spirit of religious liberty has already made great strides. In the vanguard were Rhode Island and Pennsylvania. The Reverend Roger Williams, a fiery Baptist with an inviolable conscience, bequeathed Rhode Island with a charter guaranteeing freedom of conscience to all its citizens. Williams considered it against the testimony of Christ Jesus for the civil state to impose upon the soul of the people a religion, a worship, a ministry. Calling for free and absolute permission of conscience, he was banished from Massachusetts in 1635, to establish complete religious freedom in Rhode Island the following year. Half a century later, William Penn established Western New Jersey and then Pennsylvania on many of the same liberal principles. Nonetheless, in the early eighteenth century the overwhelming majority of American citizens lived under an established state religion. The Anglican church held this franchise in Maryland, Delaware, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia (and to a lesser extent, New York), with the Congregational Church established in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut. By the time our story begins in the 1770s, most notably Massachusetts and Virginia commonwealths whose leading citizens proved instrumental to the Revolutionary cause and took leading roles in shaping the new nation still levied taxes to support both the established church and its clergy. As the new nation began to take shape, the combustible combination of state laws supporting religion and leading citizens from these same states passionate in their advocacy for such laws abolition turned Massachusetts and Virginia into the principal laboratories for church-state reform. Throughout the following pages, this dramatic story unfolds, not without its moments of ambivalence. In Virginia, Patrick Henry (whose immortal words, Give me liberty or give me death, became a rallying cry for the rebellion) was both a valiant champion of religious liberty and also among the most persistent supporters of an, albeit reformed, established church. George Washington (with Thomas Jefferson perhaps the most secular-minded of the founders) closes his presidency with a paean to the central importance of morality and religion for the future survival of the state. Jeffersons chief lieutenant, the diminutive and brilliant James Madison (principle policy wonk among the nations architects), studied for the ministry, became a dogged secular

advocate of church-state separation, and then, during his tenure as the nations fourth president, reversed Jeffersons precedent by declaring national days of fasting and prayer. Some of the figures you will meet here are less well-known: Baptist ministers Isaac Backus and John Leland for instance, and Presbyterian ministers Caleb Wallace and John Witherspoon (though Witherspoon, president of Princeton and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, was a major player on the national scene). Each a devoutly Christian champion of church-state separation, their words serve as a continuing reminder of the danger any hint of collusion between church and state poses to the attainment and maintenance of full Christian liberty. I arrange the following documents in chronological order, framing the debate with two writings that precede and follow it: the former, a ringing court summation by Patrick Henry in defense of three preachers charged with witnessing to heterodox religious views, and the latter, James Madisons bittersweet late-life reflections on the battle he and others waged for religious liberty, interlaced with his concerns about ongoing dangers that might jeopardize the integrity of church-state separation in the future. Between these bookends is a brief yet complete basic library of the most illustrative and significant documents to emerge from the original church-state debate (including Madisons Memorial and Remonstrance, Jeffersons Statute for Religious Freedom in America, and selections from Washingtons Farewell Address). In practical terms, perhaps the most important papers I include are six letters from President Washington to religious leaders affirming his sworn fidelity to church-state separation, and the 11th Article of the Treaty of Tripoli presented by President John Adams and ratified by the entire U.S. Senate which opens with the words, As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion. . . . I follow these documents with an appendix: observations on the American experiment in granting religious liberty to its citizens written by a sympathetic British observer, the Unitarian minister Richard Price. In my running commentary I attempt to bring these addresses, papers, statutes, and letters to life, weaving them into a single story by relating its chapters to one another as best I can. Whether I have succeeded in this endeavor or not, the documents stand on their own as vivid testimony to the passion, vision, and faith of these extraordinary citizens, the civic artists who forged our nation, entrusting to the care of succeeding generations the protection and further implementation of their ideals. Before I turn to the documents themselves, one final observation: advocates for a so-called return to the values upon which the United States of America was founded speak with heartfelt sincerity of the need to reestablish a Christian nation to restore the founders vision. The arguments they raise are perhaps the clearest reminder that we must revisit our early history to recover and thereby keep from betraying the founders original script.