

What God Has Put Asunder

James Madison Quotes On Church And State

James Madison wrote frequently about religious freedom and its corollary, the separation of church and state. What follows are some of Madison's best quotations on the subject.

Total Separation

"[T]he number, the industry, and the morality of the Priesthood, & the devotion of the people have been manifestly increased by the total separation of the Church from the State."

-Letter to Robert Walsh, March 2, 1819

Three Pence Only

"[I]t is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties....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? that the same authority which can force a citizen to contribute three pence only of his property for the support of any one establishment, may force him to conform to any other establishment in all cases whatsoever?"

-From the "Memorial and Remonstrance," 1785

Disproving The Old Error

"The experience of the United States is a happy disproof of the error so long rooted in the unenlightened minds of well-meaning Christians, as well as in the corrupt hearts of persecuting usurpers, that without legal incorporation of religious and civil polity, neither could be supported. A mutual independence is found most friendly to practical Religion, to social harmony, and to political prosperity."

-Letter to F.L. Schaeffer, Dec. 3, 1821

Ye States Of America!

"Ye States of America, which retain in your Constitution or Codes, any aberration from the sacred principle of religious liberty, by giving to Caesar what belongs to God, or joining together what God has put asunder, hasten to revise & purify your systems, and make the example of your Country as pure & compleat, in what relates to the freedom of the mind and its allegiance to its maker, as in what belongs to the legitimate objects of political & civil institutions. Strongly guarded as is the separation between Religion & Govt. in the Constitution of the United States the danger of encroachment by Ecclesiastical Bodies, may be illustrated by precedents already furnished in their short history."

-"Detached Memoranda," date of authorship unknown, estimated between 1817 and 1832

Teaching The World

"We are teaching the world the great truth that Govts. do better without Kings & Nobles than with them. The merit will be doubled by the other lesson that Religion flourishes in greater purity, without than with the aid of Govt."

-Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822

The Worst Of Government

"In the Papal System, Government and Religion are in a manner consolidated, & that is found to be the worst of Govts. In most of the Govts. of the old world, the legal establishment of a particular religion and without or with very little toleration of others makes a part of the Political and Civil organization and there are few of the most enlightened judges who will maintain that the system has been favorable either to Religion or to Govt."

-Letter to Jasper Adams, 1832-1833 (date uncertain)

Freedom For Every Sect

"Having ever regarded the freedom of religious opinion & worship as equally belonging to every sect, & the secure enjoyment of it as the best human provision for bringing all either into the same way of thinking, or into that mutual charity which is the only substitute, I observe with pleasure the view you give of the spirit in which your Sect partake of the blessings offered by our Govt. and Laws."

-Letter to Mordecai Noah, May 15, 1818

No Intermeddling With Religion

"There is not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion. Its least interference with it, would be a most flagrant usurpation. I can appeal to my uniform conduct on this subject, that I have warmly supported religious freedom."

-Journal excerpt, June 12, 1788

Forbidding Everything Like An Establishment

"The Constitution of the U.S. forbids everything like an establishment of a national religion."

-"Detached Memoranda"

Torrents Of Blood

"Torrents of blood have been spilt in the old world, by vain attempts of the secular arm, to extinguish Religious discord, by proscribing all difference in Religious opinion. Time has at length revealed the true remedy. Every relaxation of narrow and rigorous policy, wherever it has been tried, has been found to assuage the disease."

-"Memorial and Remonstrance"

Equality Of Rights For Sects

"Among the features peculiar to the Political system of the United States, is the perfect equality of rights which it secures to every religious Sect. And it is particularly pleasing to observe in the good citizenship of such as have been most distrusted and oppressed elsewhere, a happy illustration of the safety and success of this experiment of a just and benignant policy. Equal law protecting equal rights, are found as they ought to be presumed, the best guarantee of loyalty and love of country; as well as best calculated to cherish that mutual respect and good will among Citizens of every religious denomination which are necessary to social harmony and most favorable to the advancement of truth."

-Letter to Jacob de la Motta, August 1820

Religion Without The Aid Of Law

"The settled opinion here is that religion is essentially distinct from Civil Govt. and exempt from its cognizance; that a connexion between them is injurious to both; that there are causes in the human breast, which ensure the perpetuity of religion without the aid of the law; that rival sects, with equal rights, exercise mutual censorships in favor of good

morals; that if new sects arise with absurd opinions or overheated imaginations, the proper remedies lie in time, forbearance and example; that a legal establishment of religion without a toleration could not be thought of, and with toleration, is no security for public quiet & harmony, but rather a source of discord & animosity; and finally that these opinions are supported by experience, which has shewn that every relaxation of the alliance between Law & religion, from the partial example of Holland, to its consummation in Pennsylvania Delaware N.J. [etc.] has been found as safe in practice as it is sounds in theory. Prior to the Revolution, the Episcopal Church was established by law in this State. On the Declaration of independence it was left with all other sects, to a self-support. And no doubt exists that there is much more of religion among now than there ever was before the change; and particularly in the Sect which enjoyed the legal patronage. This proves rather more than, that the law is not necessary to the support of religion."

- Letter to Edward Everett, March 19, 1823

No Congressional Chaplains

"Is the appointment of Chaplains to the two Houses of Congress consistent with the Constitution, and with the pure principle of religious freedom? In strictness the answer on both points must be in the negative. The Constitution of the U.S. forbids everything like an establishment of a national religion. The law appointing Chaplains establishes a religious worship for the national representatives, to be performed by Ministers of religion, elected by a majority of them; and these are to be paid out of the national taxes. Does not this involve the principle of a national establishment, applicable to a provision for a religious worship for the Constituent as well as of the representative Body, approved by the majority, and conducted by Ministers of religion paid by the entire nation."

-"Detached Memoranda"

If you would like to learn more about religious liberty, please contact:

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