From: Reiner Kremer <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Jessica Kremer Lochow
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:06:20 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a private citizen, not on behalf of any organization, because I believe this Commission's work touches something basic to how we govern ourselves. We are not a theocracy, and I want to explain why that fact should shape every recommendation you make.

Start with a practical problem that no drafter of religious legislation has ever solved: there is no generic religion for government to endorse. The moment any official body chooses which Ten Commandments to post, which translation to print, which "principles of Christianity" belong in a curriculum, it has taken a side in a live theological dispute. Protestants and Catholics have long numbered and read the commandments differently; hundreds of groups claim the Bible as their own. A nineteenth-century writer put the dilemma plainly: "But there are several hundred religions professedly based on the Bible. Which shall be enforced as the true one? Whose religion shall be suppressed?" Even a congressional committee in 1830 recognized that such a choice "would constitute a legislative decision of a religious controversy," a role fit for a church council but not a republican legislature. A mandated display is never neutral heritage. It is the state ruling on doctrine.

There is a second problem, easy to miss because it looks like a gift rather than a threat: any law favoring religion, even one's own, ultimately destroys free exercise. Once government is granted authority to legislate on religion, it becomes a matter of who holds power next, and power changes hands. As one advocate for religious liberty told a Senate committee, "It is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion." He went further, warning believers against sanctioning laws favoring their own creed, because doing so "resigns his right to profess some other form of faith if he should become convinced that other form is nearer the truth than his own." Religious liberty must include the liberty to keep searching and to change one's mind. Legislation freezes that search under someone else's terms.

A deeper argument explains why government was never competent to hold this power in the first place. Our system rests on the idea that government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed. But no person can delegate their relationship to God; that is not a power anyone possesses to give away, since no one can believe, worship, or answer for another's soul. If the people never held that power themselves, they could never have handed it to any government, no matter how the Constitution is worded. No government will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to answer for any soul, so no government can rightly assume responsibility in that domain. This is not a technicality about the wording of one clause; it is a structural limit on what government is.

Finally, rights of conscience do not depend on popular vote. If a majority could grant religious liberty, a majority could revoke it, and it would never have been a right at all. As one tract stated, "that which is subject to the will of a majority is not a right." Popular government exists precisely to protect the minority, the individual, from the temptations of the many. When pressed that most Americans favored a certain religious measure, one advocate answered simply that the people, however numerous, "have no right to invade your relationship to God, nor mine." That principle should guide this Commission regardless of which faith happens to hold public favor today.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Jessica Kremer Lochow

Franktown, CO

From: "K.oP." <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:07:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

The separation of church and state is an important principle because it helps protect both religious freedom and democratic government. When religion and government become too closely connected, there is a greater risk that one set of beliefs will be imposed on everyone, including people of different faiths or no faith at all. Keeping church and state separate allows individuals to practice their religion freely without government interference while ensuring that laws are based on the rights and needs of all citizens rather than the doctrines of a single religion. This balance promotes equality, fairness, and respect for the diverse beliefs that exist within society.

America is supposed to be a place of freedom for all. If church and state do not remain separate, we run the risk of repeating the mistakes of the past. Persecution and oppression are sure to follow.

From: Reiner Kremer <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Sarah Kremer
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:08:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a private citizen from Franktown, Colorado, because I believe deeply in both halves of the First Amendment's religion guarantee, and I am concerned that this Commission's work could tilt toward favoring one faith tradition over others, or over none. Let me be direct about where I stand: no religious mandates, no theocracy. That conviction shapes everything below.

Consider first where rights actually come from. If religious liberty exists only because a majority currently votes to allow it, then it was never a right at all — only a revocable permission, subject to reversal whenever the political wind shifts. The American framework holds otherwise: rights are inherent, prior to government, and placed in our founding documents precisely to put them beyond the reach of election returns. Popular government exists to protect the minority, not to give the majority license over conscience, because the majority can already protect itself at the ballot box. As one classic statement to a Senate committee put it, "the people, I care not how many there are, have no right to invade your relationship to God, nor mine." Whatever public support a proposal for official religious expression may claim, that support cannot substitute for a right no one had the power to grant or withhold.

Second, I'd ask the Commission to consider that religious jurisdiction was never delegated to government in the first place. Our system rests on the consent of the governed — powers the people hand over. But no person can hand over his relationship to God; he cannot authorize another to believe, worship, or answer for his soul. What could never be delegated could never be received. That means government's disqualification from religion is not a narrow rule against establishing a national church; it runs deeper, to the root, because the people never had that power to give.

Third, even laws that favor a religion I personally hold would endanger my own free exercise. Any religious law must define which religion it favors, and that definition necessarily includes some believers while excluding others — leaving even the favored group practicing their faith by government permission rather than by right. Worse, it forecloses my liberty to follow my conscience if it should ever lead me elsewhere. A believer who welcomes state endorsement of his creed today is building machinery that a future administration, with different convictions, will operate tomorrow.

Fourth, there is no neutral "religion in general" for government to adopt. Protestants and Catholics number the Ten Commandments differently; hundreds of traditions claim the Bible as their own. Whenever an official body picks a translation, a numbering, or a curriculum, it has settled a live theological dispute by political power — turning a legislature or school board into something like an ecclesiastical council, which our system was never meant to be.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Sarah Kremer

Franktown, CO

From: Rachel Jameson <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment-Religious Liberty Commission Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:08:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission,

I read with interest the Executive Summary of your report. Thank you so much for your careful attention to this delicate, important, and life-altering topic.

There is much in the report with which I wholeheartedly agree. For example:

- Allowing American Citizens to fully follow their conscience and engage in spiritual and religious activities strengthens our nation.
- Faith-based institutions and businesses should be allowed to run their institutions and businesses according to their conscience, without being fined, harassed, or bullied into doing things against their conscience.
- Jews should be treated equally and not be excluded from any privileges or rights that any other citizen/student enjoys.
- Students should be allowed to express their faith.
- Parents have a right to make important value decisions for their children.
- Patients should have the right to make decisions about their care.
- Medical staff should have the right not to perform care that goes against their conscience.

Here are a few areas where I believe we should exercise caution:

- While students should be allowed to express their faith, we need to be extra careful that they express their faith in such a way that it is not condescending to others, or coercing others to do the same. If a Christian student is allowed to express their faith in the classroom, Buddhist, Islamic, and Satanist students should also be allowed to express their faith. The same should go for teachers. Once faith is allowed expression, any faith should be allowed expression. At the elementary level, these kinds of expressions, and the discussions that stem from these expressions should be handled very carefully. Teachers should direct student inquiry regarding these discussions to their parents.
- I believe public funding for schools should only be spent at public schools. This is why. Many private schools also teach religious beliefs. Schools that teach religious beliefs should be funded by those who hold the convictions of that particular school. It is not the responsibility of the government to fund schools that teach religion. Teachers who teache in religious schoosl cannot in good conscience accept tax payer dollars to promote their religious beliefs to students. This practice of accepting school vouchers at private schools may cripple private schools if laws change where suddenly any school receiving tax dollars is required to teach a specific ideaology. The school that was relying on tax dollars may suddenly crumble when it becomes necessary to refuse those dollars.
- The expression of one student's faith may violate the conscience of another student's faith.
- Once teacher expression of faith is allowed in public schools, questions on faith should be allowed at interviews for teaching positions, then teachers may lose positions based on their personal religious beliefs. For example, if a Christian teacher is allowed to have a cross and the ten commandments posted in her room, then a Satanist teacher should be allowed to post their beliefs also. If teachers are allowed

to express their faith in the classroom and I was on a school board hiring a teacher, I would be doing a little research to discover the belief system the teacher held.

- If a patient wants care that goes against the conscience of the medical professionals or institution where the patient is receiving care, then the patient should seek care at a different facility.

Thank you again for your careful work.

Sincerely, Rachel Jameson

Rachel Jameson, M.A.

From: William Polk <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:11:22 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I write to respectfully express my profound disagreement with the recommendation that the establishment clause of the First Amendment be reinterpreted to diminish the historic separation of church and state. Such a recommendation is inconsistent with the text of the Constitution, the intent of its principal architects, and the biblical principle that matters of conscience belong to God rather than civil government.

The First Amendment declares that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. These two protections were designed to work together: the establishment clause prevents the government from exercising authority over religion, while the free exercise clause protects every citizen's right to worship or not worship according to conscience. Together, they have made the United States one of the greatest examples of religious liberty in human history.

Thomas Jefferson famously described this constitutional principle as a wall of separation between church and state. Contrary to modern claims that this phrase has no constitutional significance, Jefferson was not inventing a new doctrine; he was describing a principle already embedded within the First Amendment—that government possesses no rightful authority to establish, direct, or compel religious observance.

No founder articulated this principle more clearly than James Madison, often called the father of the Constitution. In his 1785 *Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments*, Madison declared that "religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence." Religion, he argued, must remain beyond the jurisdiction of civil government because the duty owed to God precedes the authority of the state itself. Decades later, Madison reaffirmed this conviction, writing in 1822: "Religion and government will both exist in greater purity the less they are mixed together." This was not hostility toward religion; it was the recognition that both faith and government are corrupted when either

Benjamin Franklin expressed the same principle in remarkably practical terms: "When a religion is good, I conceive that it will support itself; and, when it cannot support itself, and God does not take care to support it, so that its professors are obliged to call for the help of the civil power, it is a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one." True religion persuades by truth and love, not by legislation or coercion.

These principles are not merely constitutional; they are biblical. When questioned about civil authority, Jesus Christ declared: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." In those few words, Christ established a distinction between the jurisdiction of civil government and the jurisdiction of conscience. Government possesses legitimate authority over civil order and the protection of equal rights, but worship, doctrine, and the relationship between an individual and God remain beyond its lawful reach.

History repeatedly confirms the wisdom of this distinction. Whenever church and state have been joined, both have suffered. Religious institutions have too often sought the power of the sword, while governments have attempted to regulate the conscience. The result has not been greater faith, but persecution, division, and the suppression of religious liberty.

Americans understood this lesson well. Many of the earliest settlers came to these shores precisely because they had fled governments that enforced religious conformity. The founders sought to break from that centuries-old pattern by denying the federal government any authority over religion. Article VI prohibits religious tests for public office, and the First Amendment forbids laws respecting an establishment of religion. These provisions were not accidental; they were deliberate safeguards designed to preserve liberty of conscience for every citizen.

The dangers of abandoning these principles are not merely theoretical. During the late 19th century, proposals such as the Blair Sunday Rest Bill sought to use civil law to enforce what many considered a religious duty. At the same time, members of my own faith were imprisoned in Tennessee and sentenced to chain gangs simply for working on Sunday while observing the seventh-day Sabbath according to their convictions. Their experience serves as a reminder that sincere religious majorities, when empowered by civil authority, can unintentionally deny the very liberty they seek to preserve.

This is why contemporary calls to weaken the separation of church and state are deeply concerning. A government that possesses the authority to favor one religious tradition necessarily possesses the authority to disfavor another. The same power that today may benefit one denomination could tomorrow be turned against it. Religious liberty cannot be secure if it depends upon which faith happens to hold political influence at a given moment.

The genius of the American experiment is that it protects the conscience of every person equally. Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, atheist, and every other citizen enjoys the same protection because government is forbidden from deciding questions of religious truth. That neutrality has not weakened religion in America; it has allowed it to flourish through conviction rather than compulsion.

Government is at its best when it protects the free exercise of religion, not when it defines, directs, or advances it. Likewise, religion is at its strongest when it relies upon persuasion rather than political power. The preservation of both depends upon maintaining the distinction the founders carefully established.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the commission to reject any interpretation of the Constitution that diminishes the historic separation of church and state. The preservation of religious liberty depends upon maintaining the proper boundaries between civil authority and matters of conscience. That principle is faithful to the Constitution, consistent with the teachings of Scripture, affirmed by the architects of our republic, and essential to preserving liberty for future generations.

Respectfully submitted,

assumes the authority of the other.

photograph

Logo

William Polk, PMP

Trade School Director
Campus Development Director

PII

PII

PII

From: William Polk <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:11:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I write to respectfully express my profound disagreement with the recommendation that the establishment clause of the First Amendment be reinterpreted to diminish the historic separation of church and state. Such a recommendation is inconsistent with the text of the Constitution, the intent of its principal architects, and the biblical principle that matters of conscience belong to God rather than civil government.

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Benjamin Franklin expressed the same principle in remarkably practical terms: "When a religion is good, I conceive that it will support itself; and, when it cannot support itself, and God does not take care to support it, so that its professors are obliged to call for the help of the civil power, it is a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one." True religion persuades by truth and love, not by legislation or coercion.

These principles are not merely constitutional; they are biblical. When questioned about civil authority, Jesus Christ declared: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." In those few words, Christ established a distinction between the jurisdiction of civil government and the jurisdiction of conscience. Government possesses legitimate authority over civil order and the protection of equal rights, but worship, doctrine, and the relationship between an individual and God remain beyond its lawful reach.

History repeatedly confirms the wisdom of this distinction. Whenever church and state have been joined, both have suffered. Religious institutions have too often sought the power of the sword, while governments have attempted to regulate the conscience. The result has not been greater faith, but persecution, division, and the suppression of religious liberty.

Americans understood this lesson well. Many of the earliest settlers came to these shores precisely because they had fled governments that enforced religious conformity. The founders sought to break from that centuries-old pattern by denying the federal government any authority over religion. Article VI prohibits religious tests for public office, and the First Amendment forbids laws respecting an establishment of religion. These provisions were not accidental; they were deliberate safeguards designed to preserve liberty of conscience for every citizen.

The dangers of abandoning these principles are not merely theoretical. During the late 19th century, proposals such as the Blair Sunday Rest Bill sought to use civil law to enforce what many considered a religious duty. At the same time, members of my own faith were imprisoned in Tennessee and sentenced to chain gangs simply for working on Sunday while observing the seventh-day Sabbath according to their convictions. Their experience serves as a reminder that sincere religious majorities, when empowered by civil authority, can unintentionally deny the very liberty they seek to preserve.

This is why contemporary calls to weaken the separation of church and state are deeply concerning. A government that possesses the authority to favor one religious tradition necessarily possesses the authority to disfavor another. The same power that today may benefit one denomination could tomorrow be turned against it. Religious liberty cannot be secure if it depends upon which faith happens to hold political influence at a given moment.

The genius of the American experiment is that it protects the conscience of every person equally. Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, atheist, and every other citizen enjoys the same protection because government is forbidden from deciding questions of religious truth. That neutrality has not weakened religion in America; it has allowed it to flourish through conviction rather than compulsion.

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For these reasons, I respectfully urge the commission to reject any interpretation of the Constitution that diminishes the historic separation of church and state. The preservation of religious liberty depends upon maintaining the proper boundaries between civil authority and matters of conscience. That principle is faithful to the Constitution, consistent with the teachings of Scripture, affirmed by the architects of our republic, and essential to preserving liberty for future generations.

Respectfully submitted,

assumes the
authority of
the other.

--
William Polk

From: Russell Starner <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Russell Starner
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:11:28 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing to comment on the Commission's draft report. I respectfully urge you to defend both religion clauses of the First Amendment — no establishment, and free exercise — with equal vigor. My reasons are these:

Religious liberty is a right, not a majority's permission. "A right is something which, in its very nature, is inherent in the one possessing it, independent of the will of all other persons." Popular support can justify a highway bill; it cannot justify a religious one, because religion was never among the things submitted to the vote.

Christ himself divided human duty into two jurisdictions: what we owe our neighbors belongs to civil law; what we owe God lies beyond it. As A. T. Jones told the United States Senate in 1888, "civil government is civil, and has nothing to do in the matter of legislation, with religious observances in any way." I urge the Commission to keep every recommendation on the civil side of that line.

Force can make hypocrites, never Christians — and state sponsorship corrupts the faith it favors. President Grant said it plainly in 1875: "Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the Church, and the private school, supported entirely by private contribution. Keep the State and Church forever separate."

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Russell Starner
Mount Perry, OH

From: Ely Gonzalez <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:12:01 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 12, 2026

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a citizen and a person of faith, I am deeply troubled by the Commission's proposal to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge" between the two.

The First Amendment's Establishment clause dictates that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion". We need to continue to uphold to this. There should be no need to reinterpret, modify or change that which we have upheld for the past 250 years. If any changes, modifications, or reinterpretations are made, we will be treading down a path of tyranny and not of freedom. Although there are people with Christian values it should never be forced.

This wall was built by believers to keep the church free, not by secularists to restrict religion. A bridge opens the door for government funding and political influence, forcing churches to compete for grants and answer to politicians instead of to God. History demonstrates that the blending of church and state is detrimental to both and will result in our liberties being stripped away. This is why we need to keep the Johnson Amendment enacted.

In addition, not a single point of the 12 points should be put into action. We, as the public, are not being informed of the details and were not included in the initial stages of these meetings.

The public requires ample time, information, and discussion to understand what is being proposed. Lately, President Trump has made many executive orders have been passed without public insolvent which needs to happen.

I urge you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken this separation and not move forward on any single point — specifically, using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment. When churches engage in partisan politics or accept government funding, they inherit political corruption. Separation protects faith, which is precisely why religion has remained strong in our country.

Please maintain the separation of church and state and do not repeal the Johnson Amendment - that's how we keep both free.

Respectfully,

Erodia Barragan

From: Avia Gorse <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment-Separation of Church and State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:12:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Committee Member,
As I watched the fifth hearing of Religious Liberty Commission Part 1 today and heard Shabbos Kestenbaum mentioned Rhode Island it brought my mind back into history in the 1600s and Roger Williams the founder of this state. He was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony because the leaders did not agree with his ideas.

He advocated for a separation of church and state. He saw that this separation was very important for preserving the religious freedom of God's people as well as to prevent any corruption in the church.

The author of the book The Great Controversy in commenting on Roger Williams and what he stood for wrote these words:
"The fundamental principle of Roger Williams' colony was 'that every man should worship God according to the light of his conscience." His little State, Rhode Island, became the asylum of the oppressed, and it increased and prospered until its foundation principles- civil and religious liberty-became the corner-stones of the American Republic. GC 88 294.4

To build a bridge or to call the separation of church and state a myth is to walk backwards to the time past where men were forbidden to worship according to the dictates of their own conscience. The founding fathers of this great nation recognized that the relationship between man and his maker is above human laws and thus the document- the Declaration of Independence was penned.

It is my hope and prayer that church and state will remain separate affording all men the freedom of religious liberty.
Thanks in advance for reading my letter.
Sincerely,
Avia Collins

From: Harry Nelson <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION Report comment
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:13:21 -0400
Importance: Normal

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
Via EMAIL: [redacted]

RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

Dear Sirs:

As a practicing devout Christian, I have read with interest the draft report of the RLC, submitted to President Donald J. Trump on June 26, 2026. While much of the report has positive aspects in my opinion, I must state that some aspects raise alarm regarding religious liberty as clearly defended by our Constitution. Specifically, recommendations 1 and 9 need careful scrutiny.

The first amendment clearly supports the separation of church and state, as the early history of our Founding Fathers statements and the historic record of the dangers of majority religionists controlling both Civil Power and Purse are witness. Consider the persecution of Roger Williams that lead to establishing the colony of Rhode Island. Ignored is the history of persecution of the Baptists, Quakers, Jews, and others in some of the colonies. The disestablishment of majority churches in the individual states that were funded by tax dollars lead to a stronger church and freedom for all to worship God freely without government preference or persecution. Certainly, our Founding Fathers were well aware of the long European history of civil government controlled by religious leaders that lead to the martyr death of millions, including William Tyndale for translating the Bible into English. It was a union of church and state that suppressed speech and the freedom of the press in England. It was a union of church and state that prohibited the work of translation of the Bible. The Pilgrims fled Europe due to religious persecution, only to use civil power in their early colonial government to persecute dissenting Christians of different persuasions.
The push to place a copy of the Ten Commandments in Public places begs the question: Whose version, the Biblical one of Exodus 20 that calls for a Saturday, seventh day Sabbath, or a revised Catholic catechism version that removes the second commandment and changes the Sabbath to a first day Sunday observance? Do we really want civil government showing partiality for one religious opinion over another?
The recommendation to support religious charity with tax dollars invites government control of religious expression, or partiality with agencies, if compromised religious expression is not accepted in some quarters.

Also of concern is the push to abolish the Johnson Amendment. The churches can now freely expound on the moral implications of all issues in the public square, without getting embroiled in party politics. If the Johnson Amendment is removed, religionists who want civil power will publicly stump and promise their votes and congregational dollars in exchange for political favors, and the politicians will be doubtless all too eager to reciprocate in the form of legislation that the religionists desire. Majoritarian rule in matters of religious conscience and the call for Christian control of government are directly contrary to Jesus Christ's clear directive: "render to Caesar what is Caesar, and to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21) Jesus Christ established the principle of the separation of church and state and taught that what belongs to God cannot be rendered to Caesar. Christians risk encouraging hypocrisy in exchange for political power, a very poor bargain!

In summary, I urge that the Department of Justice not adopt recommendations 1 and 9 of the Committee. If it were to move forward, public hearings that allow a full airing of the American History regarding separation of Church and State is respectfully requested.

Sincerely, Harry Nelson

From: Barbara Samuells <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Topic: Comment on Religious Liberty Commission Recommendations; Submitted By: Barbara Samuells
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:13:40 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Comments_to_Dept_of_Justice_re_Recommendations_of_Rel_Lib_Commission_7.12.26.docx

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Please see attached.

Barbara Samuells, President
Catholics for Freedom of Religion
[redacted]
[redacted] (mobile)

Comments on June 26, 2026 Recommendations by Religious Liberty Commission

For 15 years, our grassroots volunteers have taught the facts of America's religious freedom. They inspire action and prayer to preserve God's blessings for Americans of all faiths. Through the Americans for Freedom of Religion and Catholics for Freedom of Religion organizations, these volunteers have reached thousands of Americans in pews, public schools and town squares.

Upon reviewing the Religious Liberty Commission's report and recommendations we are assured of the commission's thoroughness in evaluating America's religious liberty. The commission's recommendations also reflect the needs and the obstacles our many grassroots encounters have taught us as we speak, write, give public witness, organize rallies and teach students their rights to religious expression in public school.

The commission's first recommendation is *exactly* our first lesson to any group or individual. We concur that propaganda twisting "separation of church and state" to harm freedom of conscience and freedom of worship has brainwashed most Americans and done incalculable harm. We encountered this in every group we've addressed for 15 years.

For example, we find that most Americans are unaware – although our volunteers have seen and heard it across every community – that shaming and discrimination against protected religious expression in public schools are so frequent and pervasive that students quickly realize their faith and reliance on God are not welcome. They leave their faith outside the school door and very seldom report any ill treatment to parents for fear of being embarrassed or ridiculed.

Clarifying and celebrating Jefferson's words "separation of church and state" would free a surge of religious expression into the universe of every American. The "Know your Rights" posters are definitely effective as we found by creating posters for religious education programs. Creating new monitoring and reporting procedures for denials of religious freedom, especially in public schools and religious orders, like the Little Sisters of the Poor, could show Americans they are not powerless in protecting those rights.

Honoring the courage of heroes of religious freedom would encourage more of that effective and necessary behavior and reward those who work in the trenches of local churches, schools, hospitals, government agencies, corporate offices, etc. to identify and challenge denials of religious freedom.

In our present culture faithful grassroots Americans grudgingly accept the fake "separation of church and state" as regrettable but constitutional. They are not alert to the discrimination against their children's faith in their public school. They do not stand in unison against antisemitism and religious intolerance. They cannot imagine that religious liberty would ever be denied in the military. Most Americans believe they must tolerate cultural bullying in order to be "fair-minded."

Education of all Americans as to the protection of America's religious liberty for all faiths will change the complexion of our culture. Education of our young citizens to understand and value their self-evident religious liberty will insure the survival of the United States of America as "one nation under God."

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Samuells, President

Americans for Freedom of Religion
Catholics for Freedom of Religion

From: Erika Kissinger <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:14:24 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing to you as I am very concerned regarding reports that a 'bridge' is being built between Church and State. The United States of America, the country I am a proud citizen of, was founded by people that were oppressed by governments that were controlled by the church and came here to worship God the way they believed He instructed them. I do not believe that government should tell me how to worship and the church should not fund politics. These two need to be separate. Please maintain the wall between Church and State to keep both free.

Thank you.

Erika Kissinger

From: Justin Perrone <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty (Hereinafter "RLC") Draft Report, Issued June 2026
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:15:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a New Englander and a Christian who believes in the Biblical 4th Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) as it was written by the finger of Jesus. I believe that the Sabbath starts on sunset Friday and ends on sunset Saturday. I believe that the sabbath actually started at creation (Genesis 2:1-3), before there were different languages, nations or groups of people. I believe at the time of Jesus's death that the disciples and closest followers kept the 7th day as the sabbath as well.

Unfortunately, this is different from what most Christian believers practice today. I believe this is where a problem will occur if your current draft report is accepted. I believe that when politics gets into religion, then the religion goes bad. And when religion gets into politics, then the politics goes bad.

If you look back at the history of Massachusetts, where I was born, you will see this is so true. The pilgrims who arrived at Plymouth Colony, were escaping religious persecution in Great Britain for their separatist views. The colonists who arrived in the Massachusetts Bay colony, were escaping religious persecution for their view on purifying the church.

When these two colonies combined to form Massachusetts, they actually started to persecute those who didn't follow their rules. How sad that after all the persecution that they received in Great Britain, that they would turn around and do the same thing.

Thankfully for the United States, there was a man named Roger Williams who believed that people should be able to follow God by the dictates of their conscience. He was persecuted for having those views. As a result, he had to flee Massachusetts. With the help of kind native Americans, he was able to establish the city of Providence. It was a place where people could worship God according to their own beliefs. It was true freedom of religion. That thought and belief is what made it into the first amendment.

I believe that the United States is a big enough country to tolerate many different religious beliefs. As long as we are respectful of different religious groups, then the statue of liberty can continue to welcome all those seeking a better life. The first amendment is what makes America, America. I just ask that the first four Biblical commandments be left to everyone's personal belief. No law should be forced on people to coerce compliance to beliefs contrary to their personal beliefs.

I believe that our late president, Ulysses S. Grant said it best, "Keep the Church and the State forever separate." If we can follow that, a lot of unnecessary persecution can be avoided. Let our land be free from Kings and Popes to rule over us.

With kind regards,

Justin Perrone

From: deb2go <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to the religious liberty commission
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:15:41 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am deeply saddened that I even have to send this email.
This should not even be a question of dropping or bridging the division of church & state.
It may not be in the constitution but it is what this country was built on.

For the government to be able to do this, it is UnAmerican. We all come from different backgrounds and beliefs and no one has the right to tell us what faith or belief we should have or do.

Please, I ask of you as a Human Being and an American Citizen Christian, that you accept this plea and stop moving forward with this action.

Sincerely in the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord and Savior,

Debra Hill
[redacted]
Kansas City, Missouri
USA🇺🇸

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment-Separation of Church and State, Joan
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:16:48 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was very troubled to read that the Commission wants to remove the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." With respect, that is exactly backwards — and as an individual of faith, I find the idea appalling.

That wall wasn't built by secularists to keep religion down. It was built by people, believers, to keep the church free. A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government money and political favors to march right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering to politicians instead of to God. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it is not good for either one.

Please don't build that bridge. Keep the wall. It protects the church far more than it constrains it.

Sincerely,

Joan A. Conway
Salem,Mo.

From: Jonny <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Jonathan Sellers
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:17:16 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As one desiring to follow Christ, an American citizen, a son of a US veteran, and one that has been extremely blessed to be a lifelong resident of the United States, I am concerned by the claims in this report, especially proposals 1 and 9, that would weaken the separation of Church and State that has protected and preserved the freedom we enjoy in America. History will repeat itself as in the eras of John Wycliffe, John Huss, and Martin Luther, if the power of a government is united with the influence of the church to enforce and dictate the ideologies and beliefs of a particular religious sect or denomination. These three men opposed the authoritarianism and control of the religious leaders of their day and faced trials and persecution by them.

God is love. Love does not force. Love is unconditional and gives freedom of choice despite the consequences it may reap. The latter six of the Ten Commandments are love for fellow men–three of which, while not instituted directly as a result of Scripture, are enforced for the protection, preservation, and rights of men. The first four commandments are love for God and allegiance to Him. These cannot be enforced by any without causing misrepresentation and offense to the character of God. To build a bridge between the church and state will bring about detrimental results. I respectfully ask the commission to reject these proposals and I voice my concern and opposition to the idea. I am not a scholar of law nor an official theologian of scripture, but I believe that it is neither biblical nor constitutional to unify these two entities or create laws to force allegiance to God or practice partiality towards a particular religion. While it is my honest desire that all learn and follow Christ and taste and see that He is good, I know that it is the God given right of each individual to freely accept or reject Him if they so choose.

> "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."

- U.S. Constitution, Amendment I

From the words of Christ:

"And he *(Jesus)* saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, **Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's**."

- Matthew 22:20-21 KJV

"Jesus answered, My kingdom **is not of this world**: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is **my kingdom not from hence.** "

- John 18:36 KJV

And yet another example of legal leadership attempting to participate in sacred activities that he was not appointed to:

"But when he *(King Uzziah)* was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, that were valiant men: and they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God. "

- 2 Chronicles 26:16-18 KJV

Thank you, members of the commission, for your time and consideration.

May God be with you,

Jonathan Sellers

From: Ravon Scott <[redacted]>
To: [redacted], Ravon Scott <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church & State Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:18:40 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whom is may concern:

The Founding Fathers spearheaded the American Revolution, drafted the Declaration of Independence, and established the republican form of government outlined in the United States Constitution.

Which states that:

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.

Because of this declaration, for the last 250 years The UNITED STATES OF AMERICA is free to decied whom (WE) the people wish to worship, further more our dollar bill states and I quote IN GOD WE TRUST which is to say (WE) the people have the right to CHOOSE....which means (WE) have the legal and moral entitlement to make personal decisions about our life (RELIGIONS RIGHT), OUR BODYS and our medical care WITHOUT GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE. As Dr. Martin Luther stated those famous, historical words at **the Diet of Worms in 1521, he declared** and I quote:

"Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand I can do no other may God help me. Amen."

And here some 503 years later: (WE) THE PEOPLE OF THESES UNITED STATES OF/FOR AMERICA NOW IT IS OUR TURN TO, STAND WE CAN DO NO OTHER ONLY GOD OUR FATHER, GOD OUR SON AND GOD THE HOLY GHOST WILL HELP US, WHEN HE STEPS OUT OF THE MOST HOLY OF HOLIES TO CALL HIE CHILDREN then world will see the one true GOD of Heaven and earth. AMEN

From: Emily [redacted]
To: "RLC (OASG)" [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTo- Religious Liberty Commission - Emily Newman
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:19:51 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

I am submitting this comment to urge the Religious Liberty Commission to withdraw its June 26, 2026 draft report and abandon its recommendations. I grew up in the Ethical Culture tradition, a non-theistic religion of ethics that emphasizes eliciting the best in each other and thereby in ourselves. I'm a humanist and a concerned citizen who cares deeply about American democracy and church-state separation.

Religious liberty must support all religions, not favor or weaponize one. The Commission's composition and process was dominated overwhelmingly by extremist Christians, and the Commission sidelined the experiences of those with minority beliefs, reflecting exactly the favoritism the Establishment Clause was written to prevent. The U.S. government must serve all its people because that's what it was established to do. This means not allowing public funds to be used for religious education, promoting prayer, or removing freedoms from those most in need.

If the Commission finalizes this report, it will not be protecting religious liberty: it will be dangerously undermining it. I urge the Commission to reject this draft report in its entirety and to disband without further recommendations. Our government must recommit itself to the pluralistic, secular constitutional framework that protects the conscience of every American of all religions and beliefs.

Thanks,
Emily

From: Summer Stahl <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Commission report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:22:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

While I firmly believe that we need to protect our right to worship, I do not believe the First Amendment should in any way be abandoned.
The Constitution is a living document and provided a method to make changes. The First Amendment was processed according to rules set up in the Constitution itself and thus is part of the Constitution as it is today.
Thank you for your consideration
Summer Stahl

From: Brewster Cox <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Why did Paul spend 3 yrs @ Sinai & Elijah retreated to , as well.
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:22:41 -0400
Importance: Normal

Last words of Jesus, were to study Moses & Davids writings. His Matt.24 discourse echoed the words of Isaiah 24. Luke 3:14, was his advice to the Roman soldiers. Herods temple was destroyed in a Jonah parable & the legions that did the 3-4 year seige of J. City, wereq 9 years later, destroyed by volcano Vesuvius, on the 9th of Av. Does anyone like these ODDS!?

From: Bob Lenk <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTe- ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE – Robert Lenk
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:22:52 -0400
Importance: Normal

The draft report contains numerous references to the Establishment Clause of the first amendment, and its "true meaning". However, it never clearly explains what this "true meaning" is. From my perspective, the meaning of this clause is clearly to prevent use of the power and authority of government to establish dominance or preference for one set of beliefs over others. Some violations of this are clear to almost everyone - for example Congress cannot enact a law explicitly declaring any one religion to be the official religion of the United States. However, the power and authority of government are wielded in many other ways. Many individuals hold positions, granted by the government, that give them power or authority over others. Examples include direct and indirect supervisors, higher ranking military personnel, public school teachers, and athletic coaches. These individuals, like anyone else, have the personal right to free exercise of their religious beliefs. However, when they express and exercise those beliefs in their official authoritative roles, that can and often does create at least the impression that those beliefs are linked to their authority. People who are subject to that authority (e.g. employees, lower ranking military personnel, students, and athletes) can and often do feel pressured to join in or otherwise conform to the beliefs of the person in authority. In many cases that pressure is not just perceived, but actively exercised by the person in authority. Nowhere in the 224 pages of the draft report to I see even acknowledgement of this problem.

A similar source of power and authority is majority opinion. This draft report seems to endorse and encourage government sponsored and mandated displays of religious symbols and texts because they are favored by the majority, or "reflect the community's values". There is no acknowledgement of the effect on those who do not share those beliefs.

From: Kelly Bambrick <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Kelly Bambrick
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:23:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am very much against the weakening of the separation between church and state. Church has no business dictating civil matters, and the government has no business dictating church matters. The government is there to protect the rights of its citizens so that any citizen can freely practice their faith. Separation of church and state is vital for citizens to choose whomever they want to worship without fear of retaliation. Let's not repeat the history of religious persecutions.

Sincerely,

Kelly Bambrick

Shelby Township, Michigan

From: Bill Fisher <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] I oppose any change to change in our present constitutional rights of separation church and state
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:23:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPad

From: Sharon Follett <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:24:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

From: Angelika Cherry <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty commentary
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:24:06 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

My objection to all of this is that if a law is passed requiring worship on Sunday onlythat it will cause great dissension and harm to everyone in this country.

My grandfather was forced to join the German army in World War II. This was a fight he did not want to fight and he ended up deserting his position. Most everyone in Germany was forced to join forces with Hitler's regime.

For does not force us to worship Him. And, you are already breaking the 4th commandment.

Angelika Cherry

From: Jude Jean-Baptiste <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:24:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty:

I respectfully submit this comment to express that I am not in agreement with the joining of Church and State coming together because I believe that religion is a matter which lies between an individual and God alone, and none owe an account to anyone for their faith and worship practices. God respects human free will and does not force Himself on anyone. This concept is expressed in Revelation 3:20, which says: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" and in Joshua 24:15: Joshua places the choice of who to serve before the Israelites, stating, "choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve." In addition, I believe that this principle is essential because it preserves genuine religious liberty and protects freedom of conscience of every person in the United States, regardless of their faith or whether they choose not to practice a religion.

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." U.S. Const. amend. I. This means the government cannot establish or favor a religion, and it must also protect every person's right to practice their own religion—or not practice any religion at all.

These protections apply not only to the federal government but also to state and local governments through the Fourteenth Amendment. The Fourteenth Amendment guarantees that no state may deprive a person of liberty without due process of law or deny any person the equal protection of the laws. U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1. The Supreme Court has held that the religious freedom protections of the First Amendment apply to the states through the Fourteenth Amendment. *Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 310 U.S. 296, 303 (1940).

Keeping church and state separate protects everyone. It prevents the government from favoring one religion over another or giving religious beliefs special treatment under the law. It also protects people of every faith, as well as those who have no religious beliefs, by allowing them to live according to their own conscience without government interference. The wall of separation did not originate as a secular effort to restrict religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. It also protects the church against the state so neither is able to seek power over the other.

The Supreme Court has recognized that the Establishment Clause prevents the government from passing laws that support one religion, support all religions, or favor one religion over another. *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947). This principle helps ensure that government serves all people equally, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Our country's religious diversity is one of its greatest strengths. The best way to protect that diversity is for the government to remain neutral on matters of religion. When government neither promotes nor opposes religion, every American enjoys the same constitutional protections and freedoms.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask that all government policies and actions continue to honor the First and Fourteenth Amendments by preserving the separation of church and state and protecting the constitutional rights of all people equally.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jude Marie Jean-Baptiste

References

- U.S. Const. amend. I.
- U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1.
- *Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 310 U.S. 296 (1940).
- *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1 (1947).

From: Rick Quinton <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTo- Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report – Donell Quinton
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:24:52 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

The 1st amendment to the U.S. Constitution states that Congress "shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". The principle behind this amendment is the separation of church and state. The framers of the Constitution were men of experience and insight, having come from the horrors of a Europe dominated by Church-State unions. They were intimately aware of and familiar with the great travesties of injustice that occurred during the "Dark Ages" but more directly during the 16th and 17th centuries in England. The religious persecution from the Church of England directed towards the so-called Puritans and other religious minorities was a grievous and well-documented affair. Such cruelties were made possible because the State derived its power from the Church and the Church directed its aims through the arm of the State.

Our American colonial history bears record of shameful repetitions of this kind of persecution. In the Massachusetts Bay colony and in Virginia, specifically, the union of Church and State played an irrefutable role in the suppression and harm of minority religious groups. The architects of the Constitution sought to prevent the possibility of these kinds of societal wounds reopening with the Establishment clause, and for the sake of all that is good and pure and true, this clause ***must*** persist, lest national ruin befall us.

The Christian church of modern times has lost its sense of purpose and direction. To simply "make disciples who make disciples" is a failure to recognize the weight of the Great Commission of **Matthew 28**. We are not a run-of-the-mill multi-level marketing scheme meant to promote a certain kind of culture or lifestyle. We have been given a most precious task: to prepare generations of people, countless of whom have fallen asleep in Jesus, to be fitted to stand in the presence of a Holy and matchless God. If our Christianity, if our faith, exists merely to perpetuate the American state, we have failed to understand the Gospel and will not be prepared for its culmination, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

In the book of Daniel, chapter 2, the prophet Daniel was given skill and understanding by our Sovereign God to interpret the dream Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar the Great had locked in his mind. With this interpretation, God gave Daniel a peerless gift: insight into a timeline that would run from his time to the end of the world. Through a statue in the shape of a man, every major world power was outlined and described and at the very end of time, a new power would arise, one headed by the God of Heaven. It would destroy all other kingdoms and stand forever.

When the Messiah finally arrived, hundreds of years after the death of Daniel, He sat on the Mount of Olives and warned His apostles of the things to come. He told them that their world would end, their temple would be destroyed, and they would be scattered **[Matthew 24]**. Whatever hopes of national greatness and restoration they had, Jesus did nothing to confirm or advance them. Instead, just before His ascension to the right hand of the Father, He tasked them with being His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the end of the earth **[Acts 1:8]**. It is our solemn duty as Christians to understand that Jesus is not interested in saving geographical nations, He is in the business of saving souls who

will be joined together in the formation of a new nation, made of people from every age and every ethnicity.

The United States of America is one of the few nations in world history where religious liberty has flourished. Because of this, we have been able to take a Christian faith, free of coercion, to all the world. If the wall of separation between church and state were to be destroyed and the two joined, were Christianity to be enforced by statute of law, we would lose the special privilege afforded to us as a nation by Almighty God and His displeasure will be made manifest as surely as the Sun rises in the east and sets in the west.

The separation of church and state is not a lie. It is a guiding principle that has separated and exalted this nation above all others since the ratification of the Bill of Rights.

Because of this,

I object to the union of church and state.

I object to the Department of Justice issuing guidance or clarification to the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state. Any clarification to or of the Establishment Clause must proceed through the Judicial branch, not the Executive branch.

I object to the repeal of the Johnson amendment. Christian churches exist to propagate the faith of Jesus Christ through the power of example in our communities. Through unblemished and excellent lives, through the power of the Holy Spirit and having overcome every besetting sin, we are to manifest the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes. Churches have no business making or being involved in political speech. It is an abrogation of our duty and an insult to the Apostolic and early Christian church traditions.
If the Johnson amendment is to be repealed, the non-profit designation of churches must also be repealed in tandem.

Please consider this matter carefully.

I believe that it is a matter that will decide the fate of this country.

Sincerely,
Donell Quinton
Villa Rica, GA

From: john dejesus <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] public comment, separation of church and state
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:25:37 -0400
Importance: Normal

John and Marla Dejesus

I agree with Pillars of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.

Sincerely,

John and Marla Dejesus

Dunlap, TN

From: Katie LeBlanc <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTo— RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:27:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

To Whom it May Concern:

This comment is in regard to the Religious Liberty Commission. Firstly, thank you for your stated work of preserving freedom of religion and religious expression for people of all faiths. I whole-heartedly support such an endeavor—yet, there is one aspect which causes me concern.

This is in regards to the first point of the 12 opportunities stated in the Summary Report, which reads as follows: "Instruct the Department of Justice to issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state." How this statement is interpreted has the potential to be a cause for great concern to religious liberty.

There is an idea which is gaining wide circulation and popularity among government leaders and average citizens, that separation of church and state is not found in the Constitution. And yet, if we look at the first amendment, we find all the principles of the separation of church and state, even if it is not found written word for word:

"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."

From the first amendment we can see clearly that the founding fathers wanted to keep matters of government and matters of religion separate; civil authorities were to have no reign in the realm of conscience. To bridge the gap between the church and the state—in other words, to remove the separation of church and state—would naturally tend to one religion being favored above others. History is replete with such examples, as this principle was slow to be embraced by mankind.

And to propagate the idea that "the separation of church and state is the biggest lie that's been told in America since our founding," as espoused by Chairman Dan Patrick, is erroneous and false. Consider the following quote from Thomas Jefferson:

"I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' **thus building a wall of separation between church and State.**" *Letter from Thomas Jefferson to the Danbury Baptist Association (1802),*

https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/letter-to-the-danbury-baptist-association/.

Moreover, if the idea is upheld that America is a "Christian nation," we must also turn to Scripture to find the truth about the separation of church and state. For this very point, I would invite you to look at Jesus' words found in Mark 12:17: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (See also Matthew 22:21 and Luke 20:25.) Here, Jesus clearly shows that there are obligations rendered to the government authorities, and those rendered only to God above.

If a religious liberty council exists, one of its aims should be to preserve separation of church and state. To do otherwise would be decidedly un-American. One of the factors that made America a great nation was this very principle.

The freedoms that America has sought to uphold are one of the reasons I am proud to be American. But seeing these freedoms threatened in the name of liberty is very disheartening. Please pay close attention to these things, for when we restrict liberty in one area, it begins to creep insidiously into other areas.

Thank you for considering this matter.

Katie LeBlanc

From: Scott Donwerth <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Regarding Separation of Church and State and Religious Freedom.
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:27:42 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to express my objection to the Commission's recommendation to weaken or remove the separation between church and state in any way. I am a Christian, and I do not see separation of chruch and state as a threat to faith but rather, I see it as protection for the God given right to religious freedom for all us citizens and a standard by which all other nations should aspire to.

You suggested replacing the wall separating church and state with a "bridge." Respectfully, I believe this is entirely the wrong direction for what you claim to be trying to accomplish, and it will ultimately have the opposite result. That wall was not built to keep religion out of government; it was built to keep government from legislating religion. History has shown that when political power and the Church become intertwined this way, the government will eventually determine and legislate doctrine, and those who disagree are inevitably persecuted. In fact, I can think of no other reason why you would wish to remove separation of church and state from its rightful place in our nation.

Further, I believe repealing the Johnson Amendment would be a mistake for similar reasons. Churches should be places where people of every political background can worship together without wondering whether the sermon has become a campaign speech. The mission of the Church is to proclaim the plain Gospel of Jesus Christ, not to serve as another arm of the political process.

The Constitutional provisions separating church and state have allowed U.S. citizens to seek and worship God according to the dictates of their conscience, in large part, because churches have remained independent of government influence and control. This is precisely what God intended. I hope the Commission will carefully consider that before recommending changes that could ultimately weaken the very religious liberty it seeks to protect.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

--

Scott Donwerth
Advertising Specialist/Reporter
[redacted]

From: becky vine <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment: Religious liberty commission report: Becky Vine
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:28:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

The constitution does suggest the separation of church and state. Our religious liberty is protected by the First Amendment. Everyone has the right to chosen where and how to worship. No one should be forced to worship on a certain time or day. God gave us the 10 commandments, but he also gave us all free will.

The government should not have a say as to what is taught in religious gatherings.

The government should have not have a hand in supplying funds to private or religious schools. Private schools and religious entities should be in control of what they want to spend and support within their religious community.

God gave the 10 commandments to Moses and they were passed down from generation to generation. The government should not be forcing schools and religious entities to display them, especially since they have been altered from the original by man.

Becky Vine

From: Brenda Newton <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment—— separation of church and state. (Brenda Newton
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:29:07 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission:
I was troubled to read that the commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge,"
With respect, that is exactly backwards—— and as a person of faith, I find the idea alarming. That wall wasn't built by secularists to keep religion down. It was built by believers to keep the church free.
A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government money and political favors to march right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering to politicians instead of God. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands and it isn't good for either one. Please don't build the bridge. Keep the wall. It helps the church far more than it constrains it.

Sincerely
Brenda Newton

From: Indra Perry <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] I express my concern about the situation and hope Hod intervenes
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:29:57 -0400
Importance: Normal

From: Renata Drake <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:30:23 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a citizen and a person of faith, I am deeply troubled by the Commission's proposal to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge."

This wall was built by believers to keep the church free, not by secularists to restrict religion.

A bridge opens the door for government funding and political influence, forcing churches to compete for grants and answer to politicians instead of to God. History demonstrates that the blending of church and state is detrimental to both.

I urge you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken this separation—specifically, using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When churches engage in partisan politics or accept government funding, they inherit political corruption. Separation protects faith, which is precisely why religion has remained strong in our country.

Please maintain the separation of church and state - that's how we keep both free.

Sincerely,

Renata Drake

Athens,oAL

From: Andy Williams <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, June 2026
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:30:52 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission (RLC):

First, let me say that I greatly appreciate your time and efforts to ensure that religious persecutions in their various forms have no place in the USA. I read some of the testimonies in the "Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, June 2026" and was angered by the coercion propagated by government officials (education, military, etc.) and amazed that this could even happen here. Thus, I fully understand and appreciate President Trump's initiative in establishing the RLC. Freedom of conscience should never have to take a back seat under the threat of punitive measures.

I would, however, offer some words of caution for the RLC. While it is clear that the phrase "separation of church and state" has been abused and admittedly, these words do not appear in the US Constitution, the concept is very much present and recognized by several of the framers, giving us an inside glimpse into the thoughts of the day. To quote a few:

- Thomas Jefferson: "*I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church & State."*
- James Madison: "*The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."*
- Roger Williams: advocated for a "*hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world*" pointing out that mixing religion and state power would ultimately corrupt the church.
- John Leland: *"Never promote men who seek after a state-established religion; it is spiritual tyranny — the worst of despotism…It converts religion into a principle of state policy, and the gospel into merchandise."*
- Benjamin Franklin: *"When a Religion is good, I conceive that it will support itself; and when it cannot support itself, and God does not take care to support it, so that its Professors are oblig'd to call for the help of the Civil Power, 'tis a Sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one."*

The ground upon which you have chosen to venture is delicate and fraught with danger if the perceived conclusions are not carefully considered. To openly state that the separation of church and state does not appear in the Constitution without also providing a cautionary tone, opens the door for future legislation and court precedent which can and will lead to unintended consequences such as the persecution which the above quoted framers feared. By pushing back against the idea of separation in the Constitution in your draft document, you are essentially eliminating guardrails that were imposed to ensure that the USA never experiences the persecutions that plagued Europe during the Dark Ages.

Specifically, I'd like to voice my opposition to:

- **Any funding opportunities for religious organizations** – suffice to permit them freedom of operation without dollars being sent their way by the government.
- **Repeal of the Johnson Amendment**. Although it sounds like a good idea to permit preachers the right to support or criticize political candidates while maintaining their tax-exempt

status, it also opens the way for churches to become Super PACs, thus potentially merchandising the Gospel. Our Savior indicated in John 18:36 that “My Kingdom is not of this world.” We should leave it that way.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

Andy Williams

From: KELLY KINSELY <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Appeal to the Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:32:10 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a physician and a private citizen who believes deeply in the free exercise of religion and who is troubled by how that exercise has been squeezed in recent years. I have read testimonies showing real burdens placed on believers by hostile policies, and I do not dismiss them. But my mother used to tell me that two wrongs don't make a right, and that pearl of wisdom applies directly here: correcting one clause's violation by violating the other clause is not a remedy, it is a trade of one injury for another.

Consider first why any law touching religion, even one meant to help believers, ends up harming free exercise. Such a law must define which religion or practice qualifies for its protection, and that definition necessarily includes some believers while excluding others. Even those included are no longer practicing freely; they are practicing on terms a legislature wrote and a future legislature can rewrite. As one commentator put the matter to a Senate committee long ago, no man can safely consent to legislation favoring the very faith he holds, because in doing so he gives up his own right to change his mind if he later becomes convinced some other faith is nearer the truth. A commissioner should ask: whichever faith this commission favors today, are you prepared to have that same machinery run tomorrow by people who do not share it?

History confirms this is not a modern overreaction but the founders' deliberate design. Madison, who drafted the First Amendment, told the Virginia ratifying convention plainly that there is not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion, and that its least interference would be a flagrant usurpation. This separation was pressed for by churches themselves, groups who had felt establishment from underneath and wanted none of it, whether their own or anyone else's. The Memorial and Remonstrance explains why the founders objected to even small religious entanglements rather than waiting for full establishments to form: they saw the consequences bound up in the principle, and so denied the principle at its very first appearance. A commission that reads the Establishment Clause as merely barring a national denomination bears the burden of explaining away Madison in his own words.

Finally, this is not only a matter of founding-era argument; it is a matter of settled governmental precedent. When Sunday-observance petitioners pressed Congress in 1829 and 1830, the resulting Senate and House reports declared that it is not the legitimate province of the legislature to determine what religion is true or false, and that government is chosen to guard the rights of man, not to restrict the rights of conscience. Those same reports warned that if Congress could define even one point of religious duty by law, it could with equal right proceed to define every religious obligation. That warning was written while men who had lived through the founding still sat in Congress. It is not a twentieth-century court's invention; it is the government's own precedent, and this commission would need to overturn it, not merely reinterpret it.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Kelly Kinsley, M.D.

From: tl caldwell <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:32:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

Response to The Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty:

Via Electronic Mail to [redacted]

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a concerned American, resident of Ohio, I wish to voice my concern over the Executive Branch - Religious Liberty Commission Report, briefly summarized in the Executive Summary.

As stated – “The Commission’s work began with acknowledging a simple but profound truth: religious liberty is essential because religion itself is indispensable to a flourishing society.”

This opening statement is true enough, that “religion itself is indispensable to a flourishing society” yet establishing the new office in the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government is of great concern, at its outset, specifically:

1. As U.S. Government policies bridge the gap into the religious life of the nation, never before done in our nation nor constitutionally permitted, the policy of funding selected church organizations, their church activities, welfare and social benefit programs, church educational programs etc, the U.S. Government will be funding church operations overall which has always been the Scriptural duty or prerogative of the individual church congregations through direct congregational support.

2. The selection of which churches receive federal funding seemingly broad in scope

across numerous denominations that have never been unified together in practice and doctrine to take such a great step of working together seemingly for the greater purpose of Religious Liberty. This alone would be redefining religious liberty, that is, the inherent right of every church to operate without government funding and regulation, inviting direct government involvement in religious matters, certainly weakening the First Amendment, the clear prohibition of involvement in church matters through policy development via government funding requirements.

3. I support the The Pillar of Freedom.org extensive response to the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission report objective, particularly to undermine the historical separation of church and state in the United States, apart from Thomas Jefferson's one letter to the Danbury Baptists since church state separation principles were already generally enshrined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. I also think it is unfortunate and unfair that such a short window of time was given for public response to the RLC report. My express objections are:

a) Government financial support for religious, faith-based non-profits.
b) Government financial support for religious education.
c) Politicization of Churches and Religious non-profits by repealing the Johnson Amendment. A request that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced.
d) Singling out one religion for special government protection.
e) Indoctrination of Americans in the ideology of the Commission...

At its core, the Presidential RLC report is an attempt to weaken and dismantle the long-standing separation of church and state in this nation. Initiating a direct political connection to this nation's churches will inevitably result in religious persecution, particularly with the developing policy of a National Day of Rest, historically a controversial policy going back to the Blair Amendment in the U.S. Senate in 1888, when an alliance of churches sought to bring in a National Day of Rest at that time, that is known as the National Sunday Law. There are many Seventh-day Sabbath keeping churches in the U.S.A. which could not be forced into such a government policy further in violation of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

In closing, it should be remembered that the first settlers of this nation were refugees primarily in opposition to the unified church-state monarchy of England, fleeing the religious restrictions and persecutions of the British empire at that time. It is one thing to encourage religious life in American, by proclamation such as a National Day of Prayer but quite another to set up national religious policies with federal taxpayer funded support of churches and their religious and social programs. I do not want my tax dollars to be used to this end or for this purpose.

Sincerely,
Thomas L. Caldwell

Sent with Proton Mail secure email.

From: "firstJohn4.9" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT--Separation of Church and State--John Pitcher
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:32:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Please do just as your name of the Religious Liberty Commission says--continue the separation of Church and State. Founding governments of the many of the colonies embraced religious freedom before our US Constitution was written. They influenced the principle of being able to worship as they desired, or even not to worship any God. It is very disturbing to me, a citizen of the Us to see you urging the dismantling of religious liberty, especially separation of mChurch and State. Whenever government and churches have joined together, it always brings persecution of those not aligning with the government's idea of who we should worship. It begins with using public tax dollars to support churches and their educational systems. I am against using any tax dollars for any church related programs. I am a follower of Jesus, and see that when churches take tax dollars, they come under control of the one giving the money. Don't recommend this!!! It weakens the churches.

Also, do not repeal the Johnson Amendment, as when congregations are told who to vote for from a pulpit, the churches together can control the government by electing Senators and Representatives who will do the favored church's bidding, bringing about the loss of religious freedom. Please enforce the Johnson Amendment fully--it keeps religion from taking over government, keeps this country free from religious persecution.

I had a personal experience of being told after working for 20 years with the state of Wyoming as an electrician that I would have to work on the Bible Sabbath (Saturday). I had explained before they hired me that I would not do ordinary work on God's holy Sabbath. The personal manager asked the Maintenance foreman if that would be a problem. He Said no, it would not be an issue. Then 20 years later, the same foreman told me I would be required to work on God's holy Sabbath. My church lawyer had to send the institution I worked at a copy of the law that stated they had to allow me Sabbath's off from normal duties. The State of Wyoming also came up with the same law, and I did not have to perform regular work on the Sabbath. I was called in several times a year with emergencies, where I did come in to keep the residents safe by working on the Sabbath. So, PLEASE do not change the religious freedom we enjoy in this country--one based on Religious Liberty and separation of Church and State. It is what makes our country strong and free, the best country on the planet.

Sincerely,

John Pitcher
Sent with Proton Mail secure email.

From: Dan Herzberg <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RLC view regarding separation of church & state
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:32:56 -0400
Importance: Normal

I want to thank the RLC for upholding religious freedom as primarily a conscience issue. We all have enjoyed civil and religious freedom in this great country as a foundational principle. A separation of church aurhority and state authority has been the enduring substance of that foundation! Let us not attempt to build on any changing foundation which history reveals as much inferior and failed, and has lead to societal persecutions.
Truly, while the words "separation of church" do not appear in the constitution, the following words; "Congress (state) shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion (church), or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" clearly do.
Great caution must be employed in any revision of a principle which has stood the test of time for 250 + years and made this a great nation. The RLC spokesman addressing President Trump and the press stated that this "phase, separation of church and state" is not in the constitution. But could we consider... that in 1785 James Madison wrote "Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments". Madison layed out 15 compelling arguments for strict separation of church and state.
More recently, in 1971, the Supreme Court voted 8-1 in the case of "Lemon v. Kurtzman" that the "establishment clause" (church/state issues) had been violated. But if separation of church and state does not exist...how could a ruling be made against it? In 1985 the Chief Justice William Rehnquest stated that the separation of church & state was a useless "metaphor" & should be abandoned feeling it lacked grounds in the constitution. However, feelings can often be misleading and are an inadequate basis for decisions.
The real "grounds and foundation" for life lies in God's word where He taught that mankind should give to government what is their's, and to God what is His. (Matt. 22:21) The jurisdictions are compatible when they stay in their 'seperate' lanes and are not engaging in 'power struggles'. Then it is that religious liberty- liberty of conscience will be inalienable to all.

Respectful submitted for consideration.

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Religious Liberty Commission Report – Bernard Jaeger
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:33:32 -0400
Importance: Normal

Members of the commission:

I am in favor of the report, but I have the following comments that I did not see addressed in the report. The definition of religion is so vague that it can spill over into the radical factions of any religious organization. Currently, I see our laws, based upon Biblical laws, as an overriding factor in judicial proceedings.
In England, they are dealing with Sharia law courts that overrides English jurisprudence. I don't want that type of dual system in the USA. It is not compatible with the fostering of life and liberty. People coming to live in the USA need to assimilate into its culture and abide with the US Constitution and all states laws.

From: e"[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:34:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

We are letting you know that we support religious liberty in our United States of America! We do NOT want the government to be in coltrol of how we worship God. We believe in seperation of church and state!

From: Bradley Booth <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom Committee
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:37:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Freedom Committee:

I am very proud to be an American citizen, and I'm grateful to God that we can live in a nation that offers religious freedom. I am not in favor of any legislation that removes the legislative barriers between our government and church. This is a prized gift from God and one we should value above all others. Church and state should operate separately from one another.

Bradley Booth, EdD
Pastor, Professor, Author
Director, the StoryTellers Ministries

[redacted]

"Looking for that blessed hope." Titus 3:13

Remember, we are all missionaries, or we are the mission field.

From: Wyatt Allen <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:37:55 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Esteemed Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write to you as a pastor, and as a man whose faith is not a compartment of his life but the center of it. I hold my convictions deeply. And it is precisely because of those convictions and not in spite of them, that I ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your draft report that would weaken the separation of church and state, particularly the expansion of government funding for religious organizations engaged in religious activities, and the repeal of the Johnson Amendment.

Let me first say where we agree. I share your love for religious liberty. I believe our nation was founded on Protestant principles, and the core of those principles is liberty, liberty of conscience, the freedom of every soul to answer to God without interference from any earthly power. I hold the First Amendment in the highest esteem as I know you do. Religious liberty is not one freedom among many; it is the bedrock upon which every other freedom rests. If this Commission's work were to result in a renewed national appreciation of that truth, I would rejoice with you.

But I am troubled, because unlike many who would revise our history, I believe the First Amendment was designed for the very purpose of keeping the church from controlling the state and the state from controlling the church. The separation of church and state is a basic and simple principle, and it should not be repudiated, in word or in deed. Even if it has been abused. That wall was not built by secularists to drive God out of American life. It was demanded by believers, by dissenters, exiles, and plain people of faith who had felt the weight of state-established religion and who understood a truth we forget at our peril. That is that the church is never in greater danger than when the government offers to become its patron.

That is why the recommendation to expand government funding of religious organizations and religious activities alarms me. I understand the appeal. The needs are real, and many of the ministries are worthy. But the hand that funds is the hand that governs. A church that comes to depend on government grants will, sooner or later, shape its message to keep them. It will soften what the state finds inconvenient and amplify what the state rewards. It will answer to program officers instead of to God. And when the political winds shift, as they always do, the same funding mechanisms built by friendly administrations will be inherited by unfriendly ones. What is offered today as support will function tomorrow as leverage. The church does not need the government's money. I believe a church that depends upon the government is not a church depending upon God.

For these reasons, I ask you to withdraw the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment, and I ask instead that it be fully and evenhandedly enforced. I say this as a pastor. The pulpit I stand behind does not belong to me, and it certainly does not belong to any political party. The moment America's pulpits become instruments of campaigns, the church trades its prophetic voice for a partisan one. And we know it will never get the exchange back at par. Congregations will be sorted by candidate rather than gathered by Christ. Political money will find its way into sanctuaries, because political money always finds the open door. The Johnson Amendment is not a muzzle on the church; it is a guardrail that has helped keep the American church credible, independent, and free. And, to some degree, politicians a little more honest, and less manipulative.

Beneath all of this lies my deepest conviction, and it concerns the character of God Himself. God does not coerce. He created beings free to choose, and He honors that freedom even at infinite cost to Himself. When Christ walked this earth, He was offered earthly power and refused it. His kingdom, He said, is not of this world. Christ's kingdom will not be advanced by law, by funding streams, or by government initiatives, but by the government stepping back and letting the church have a free place to prosper. It is advanced by a church that wins hearts the way its Lord does: by love, by service, and by truth freely offered and freely received. I believe God is glorified and His character is revealed when His people grant others the same freedom of choice that He grants us. That's the beauty of the First Amendment and our founding fathers' faith.

History bears sober witness here. I grieve with the many, across the centuries and across the world, who have been persecuted in the name of liberty. Oh, the irony of it all. Whenever the church has taken the state's sword into its hand, it has wounded the very people it was called to save, and it has disfigured the face of God before a watching world. I have no reason to believe we would be the exception. Neither do you. Or should you.

Let me be clear about what I am not asking. I am not asking you to tear God out of this nation. I am asking you to refuse preferential treatment to any faith. Including my own. True neutrality is not hostility to religion; it is the only soil in which all religion can grow honestly. A faith propped up by the state is a faith that has stopped trusting its God. I pray for my leaders,

and I hope they are faithful to God's voice and His holy Word as they seek to live honest lives and put into practice policies and laws that are just and noble. I realize that the irreligious have an agenda. But let's not overcome them by force, but by faith.

So I beg you, as you finalize this report: consider the ramifications for our society of diminishing the separation of church and state. It will not be good. Not for the state, and not for the church. Keep the wall. Rightly understood, it has protected the church far more than it has ever constrained it, and it is one of the chief reasons faith remains vigorous in America while it has withered in lands where it leaned on the throne.

Thank you for receiving this comment, and for your service. May God grant you the wisdom to protect the liberty He Himself refuses to violate.

Respectfully,

WYATT ALLEN

Associate Speaker, Amazing Facts International

Cell: [redacted]
[redacted]
WyattAllen.org (Ministry Hub)
FindTrueSuccess.com (Coaching Website)
AdventAI.app (Ministry AI Tool)

https://findtruesuccess.com/product/the-least-of-the-least-from-crime-to-christ-by-wyatt-allen/

IMPORTANT: This email and any attachments may contain confidential information intended solely for the use of the individual or ministry to whom it is addressed. If you are not the intended recipient, please notify the sender and delete this message. Any advice or counsel provided is offered in a spirit of love and faithfulness to God's Word, but always seek God's wisdom and guidance: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

From: Violet Douglas <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] My response
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:38:53 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to submit my formal public comment expressing total opposition to the recommendations put forward in the June 2026 draft report. Rather than protecting true religious freedom, this document outlines an alarming blueprint to systematically break down the constitutional wall between church and state, while simultaneously narrowing the religious liberties of everyday Americans.
True religious freedom requires the government to remain strictly neutral. By attempting to elevate a singular, preferred religious viewpoint to a position of federal backing, this report actively undermines the First Amendment.
I urge the Commission to completely reject the following recommendations before a final report is issued:

1. The Subversion of the Johnson Amendment
The recommendation to eliminate or weaken the Johnson Amendment directly threatens the independence of both our political system and our houses of worship. Allowing tax-exempt religious institutions to funnel money into political campaigns and endorse candidates turns sacred spaces into partisan tools. This narrows religious liberty by forcing churchgoers into politically divided congregations and inappropriately subsidizes political speech through tax-exempt dollars.

2. The Diversion of Public Funds to Religious Education
The report's push to expand federal voucher programs and direct public tax dollars to religious private schools is a direct violation of the Establishment Clause. Public funds must support public education, which serves all children equally. Forcing taxpayers to fund religious instruction—including schools whose doctrines they may fundamentally disagree with—is a severe infringement on individual freedom of conscience.

3. The Weaponization of "Conscience Protections" to Discriminate
The report seeks to radically expand "Free Exercise" rights for corporations, government-funded agencies, and healthcare providers at the direct expense of individual citizens.
In Healthcare:Expanding medical refusal clauses allows providers to deny essential care to patients based on religious dogma, compromising patient safety and autonomy.
In Social Services:Allowing taxpayer-funded adoption and foster care agencies to reject qualified families based on sexual orientation or religion is state-sanctioned discrimination.
In the Workplace:Broadening corporate religious rights allows private business owners to override federal labor protections, stripping employees of their reproductive healthcare benefits and civil rights.

4. The Exclusion of Minority Faiths and Non-Religious Americans
Religious liberty must be absolute and equal for all people. The draft report focuses almost exclusively on protecting majority Christian institutions while largely ignoring the documented rise of discrimination against Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist Americans, as well as the rapidly growing secular population. By favoring one religious tradition, the report inherently narrows the freedom of all others.

Conclusion
The recommendations in this report do not defend liberty; they attempt to create a dangerous union between church and state that historical precedent proves will lead to oppression, division, and the erosion of minority rights. I demand that the Commission uphold the strict separation of church and state—the very framework that has allowed diverse religious expressions to thrive peacefully in America for over two centuries.

Sincerely,

Violet Douglas

From: Uche 'Kachi Sampson <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTo- Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report – Uche Sampson
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:39:14 -0400
Importance: High
Attachments: Pulbic_Comment_RLC_Report_Final.pdf

July 12, 2026
Via Electronic Mail to [redacted]
Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

The United States of America holds a unique significance in the context of biblical prophecy. It is through divine providence that this nation emerged from humble beginnings to become a global superpower. A cornerstone of its success is the principle of separation of church and state, which has allowed for the religious freedoms enjoyed for the past 250 years. This model of freedom has influenced other nations around the world.

The Founding Fathers recognized the vital role of religion in the prosperity of the nation. This understanding is reflected in America's foundational documents, such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, which contain numerous references to Protestant principles. However, it is essential to note that the same Founding Fathers asserted that the United States was not established primarily as a Christian nation, as indicated in Article 11[1] of the Treaty of Tripoli. This prima facie contradiction does not imply a dismissal of religious influence; rather, it highlights a nuanced approach to governance.

The Founding Fathers believed that while church and state should remain distinct, a nation could only thrive if its citizens acknowledged a higher power. In his farewell address in 1776, George Washington emphasized that "of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports."[2] Similarly, John

[1] Art. 11. As the Government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion; as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquility, of Mussulmen (Muslims); and as the said States never entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mahometan (Mohammedan) nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Tripoli

[2] Washington's Farewell Address. https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp

Adams remarked that "our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."[3]

This duality does not reflect a contradiction but rather a delicate balance maintained for over two centuries. The framework ensures that the government remains separate from religious institutions while acknowledging that individual rights derive from an acknowledgment of a Creator. Importantly, the Constitution does not specify any particular deity or religion, nor does it mandate religious imposition upon the populace.

The Founding Fathers intentionally left ambiguity regarding which God should be recognized, informed by historical lessons from the Dark Ages and the establishment of the Church of England. They sought to prevent the imposition of state-sanctioned religion while also guarding against the chaos and persecution witnessed during the French Revolution. The balance they created has allowed for religious freedom without the threat of tyranny, whether from religious zealots or secular factions.

As we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, it is crucial to recognize the role of religion in upholding principles of conscience and freedom. History illustrates that where church and state are intertwined, persecution often follows—this pattern is evident in ancient civilizations—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, Holy Roman Empire—and throughout the history of Christianity, as outlined in the prophetic texts of Daniel and Revelation. It is vital that no specific religion be legislated or enforced by the state.

Presently, the United States stands at pivotal point. Some advocate for the nation to be declared a Christian state, seeking to legislate moral values. However, there is a barrier that is preventing this from taking place. That barrier is a classic little document called, the United States Constitution. For over a century, religious zealots have been trying to do one of two things. They have been trying to either change it or repudiate it. This isn't anything new. There was a group that tried to change the constitution in the mid to late 19th century. They were named the National Reform Association, and their goal was to change the Constitution as follows: "WE, THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES, recognizing the being

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[3] **John Adams** to the officers of the Massachusetts Militia in October 1798

and attributes of Almighty God, the Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures, the law of God as the paramount rule, and Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Savior and Lord of all, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessing of liberty to ourselves and to our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."[4]

While some push for the nation to be declared a Christian state, others contend for the complete removal of religious influence from public life. Neither perspective aligns with the foundational principles that fostered America's greatness. The Founding Fathers understood that a healthy society relies on the flourishing of religion, coupled with an acknowledgment that individual rights stem from a Creator without the imposition of any specific religious doctrine by the government. God does not require changes to the Constitution or the repudiation of its principles; He seeks committed Christians who prioritize divine guidance over political power.

As we commemorate this significant milestone in our nation's history, it is essential to resist the urge to undermine the Constitution in the name of combating secularism. Such actions risk repeating the historical cycles of extremism that can lead to authoritarianism. We should strive to focus on the eternal kingdom rather than the transient kingdoms of this world.

May the grace of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit guide us all.

Uche Sampson

[4] The National Reform Association. https://www.logcollegepress.com/blog/2018/1/26/the-national-reform-association

From: Jonathon Cherne <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Chapter 2: Building Bridges Between Church and State – Jonathon Cherne of the Church State Council
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:39:32 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Ltr_to_RLC_7.12.2026.pdf
Inline-Images: image001.png

Dear Religious Liberty Commission, please find attached my comments to the draft of the Religious Liberty Commission Report.
Please provide a copy to Chairman Patrick, Vice Chairman Carson, and Members of the Commission.

Sincerely,

Jonathon Cherne, Esq.
Vice President

CHURCH STATE COUNCIL
Est. 1964

[redacted]

Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Chairman Dan Patrick,
Vice Chairman Ben Carson
PII

Dear Chairman Patrick, Vice Chairman Carson, and Members of the Commission:

The Church State Council (CSC) is a nationally recognized not-for-profit legal services organization, and the oldest public policy organization in the southwestern United States devoted exclusively to issues of liberty of conscience and religious discrimination. Although based in California, the Council's work has become national in scope. The CSC has been providing such services for over sixty (60) years, ever since Title VII was first enacted in 1964. Most recently, in partnership with Commissioner Shackelford and his team at First Liberty, we achieved a generational change in the law through our representation of Gerald Groff in the United States Supreme Court. S*ee Groff v. DeJoy,* 600 U.S. 447 (2023).

This response commends the Commission for recognizing the centrality of conscience, the dignity of religious conviction, and the need to protect individuals and communities from coercion in matters of faith and from discrimination and intolerance. The report rightly identifies religious liberty as an indispensable civil right and recognizes that government must not punish citizens for living according to sincere religious conviction.

At the same time, the report's proposed framework risks weakening the very liberty it seeks to defend by suggesting a bridge be built between church and state. As discussed below, *I urge you to revise the Commission's report to clearly distinguish between protecting religious exercise and enlisting civil government in religious activity. The former is essential; the latter is dangerous.* This is not an argument for excluding religious adherents from public life. It is an argument for protecting religion from civil control and protecting civil government from ecclesiastical control.

What history has taught us is that religious freedom is most secure when civil government has no authority to sponsor, fund, supervise, prefer, define, manage, or partner with religion as religion. We share many of the concerns the report highlights. However, most of them would benefit from America strengthening the wall of separation between church and state, not by tearing down the wall and building a bridge. Strengthening the wall will give equal access and eliminate government favor. More importantly, it will ensure that Caesar's sword stays out of the hands of the church, and that Christ's gospel stays out of Caesar's hands.

I understand that the Commission is not fond of Jefferson's letter. But, this foundational principle of separating church and state did not originate with Jefferson or the Constitution. It was Christ Himself who first stated this ideal for the relationship between civil government and the church. He said, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Luke 20:25.

Our Savior recognized that the church and the state each have their own legitimate sphere of jurisdiction. **The state is entrusted with the sword to preserve civil order for men who will not be moral; the church is entrusted with the gospel to transform hearts so that men will choose to live moral lives.** Religious liberty keeps each from taking up the other's work.

Thus, the Commission's report goes too far by suggesting a bridge between the two. What is needed is not a bridge, but a stronger wall of protection that prevents either institution from taking up the other's responsibility.

This response urges the Commission to modify its report to recognize the following:

I. This nation should strengthen the wall between church and state, not build a bridge, in order to preserve the purity of both.

II. Social benefit alone does not justify government mandate or promotion.

I. The Report Should Strengthen The Wall Between Church And State, Not Build A Bridge, In Order To Preserve The Purity Of Both.

The report heavily criticizes the phrase "wall of separation" and suggests that religious liberty may be better understood as a "bridge" between church and state. I strongly encourage the Commission to reconsider that new metaphor.

PII

A bridge may sound cooperative and benign, but the history of religious liberty teaches that the danger often begins with seemingly beneficial cooperation. It creates the picture that government can freely travel across this philosophical bridge into the space of the church, and that the church can freely travel into the government's realm. Thus, violating the two spheres that Christ declared separate. Once civil government is invited to aid religion, subsidize religion, or administer religious partnerships, government necessarily acquires some measure of authority to classify, supervise, audit, condition, and/or regulate religion. What begins as support often turns into some level of control. A bridge adulterates the purity of both organizations. It also allows the societal diseases that might be affecting one to travel across the bridge and affect the other.

I agree with the Commission that hostility to religion is a real problem in America. Religious believers should not be treated as suspect because they are religious; religious institutions should not be oppressed because of their faith; and public officials should not use secular authority to demean, penalize, or marginalize religious conviction. The state must protect religious persons and communities from discrimination, coercion, and oppression.

But the solution is not to answer hostility with governmental patronage. Civil government does not cure anti-religious bias by becoming a sponsor, manager, funder, or partner of religion as religion. That approach merely shifts the danger from exclusion to preference and then control. Once government undertakes to favor, promote, subsidize, or officially validate religion, it must decide which religious actors qualify, which activities count as religious, which uses of public support are acceptable, and which forms of religious service deserve endorsement. Those judgments are themselves exercises of religious competence that civil authority does not possess.

This is why "the wall" is the best metaphor. Using the imagery of Roger Williams, the church really is like a garden. The state can protect the church by building a wall around the garden to protect it from both hostility and favoritism. In the Christian faith, this gives the Holy Spirit freedom to work in the garden to bring about the harvest. However, when the state builds a bridge to the church, it causes the church to rely on the "might" and "power" of the state, instead of "by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts." Zech. 4:6. God is then unable to work for the Church, because the church has put its faith and hope in the power of the state.

PII

While it is true the exact phrase “separation of church and state” is not in the Constitution, the principle is there in the First Amendment, which is what Jefferson refers to in his letter in the very sentence that mentions a wall. But, as noted above, “separation of church and state” did not originate with Jefferson. It is a Christian principle taught by Christ Himself.

The fact that the phrase “separation of church and state” is not stated word for word is of no consequence. There are many rights Americans have that are not specifically stated in the Constitution. If constitutional principles existed only when their exact wording appeared in the text, then many familiar constitutional doctrines would be in doubt, including the right to remain silent, the presumption of innocence, privacy principles, and the right to marry.

The Constitution often protects principles fairly derived from its text, structure, and history, even when later shorthand phrases do not appear word-for-word. Indeed, the Ninth Amendment expressly warns that the enumeration of certain rights "shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people." The constitutional question, therefore, is not whether a particular phrase appears in the text, but whether the underlying principle is fairly derived from the Constitution's language, structure, and history.

On that point, the historical evidence is substantial. Long before Jefferson penned his letter to the Danbury Baptists, and even before the First Amendment was adopted, many of America's leading advocates of religious liberty argued that civil government and the church occupied distinct spheres of authority. We see it in Virginia’s disestablishment movement. Also, Roger Williams urged that a "hedge or wall of separation" protect the church from the corrupting influence of civil power. James Madison argued that Christianity neither needed nor should depend upon the support of government. Benjamin Franklin wrote: "When a Religion is good, I conceive that it will support itself... if its Professors are obliged to call for the help of the Civil Power, 'tis a sign... of its being a bad one." Many of the Founders understood that religion would remain strongest and purest when it was not supported by political power.

Indeed, the American experiment has often been celebrated not because it erased religion from public life, nor by championing certain religious faiths, but because it rejected the Old World models where either: 1) civil rulers exercised authority over the

PII

church; or 2) churches used the state to enforce their teachings and sustain their institutions.

The principle of separating the respective jurisdictions of church and state became one of the distinguishing characteristics of American constitutionalism. Whether one describes that principle as the "separation of church and state" or by some other phrase, its historical roots run deeply through the founding era and the development of American religious liberty.

Thus, the proper response to the hostility happening in this great nation is therefore not a closer alliance between church and state, but a firmer commitment to civil protection: 1) from those who seek to commit violence towards a faith; 2) of those who engage in the voluntary exercise of their faith; and 3) for institutional independence between religious authority and civil power.

The Commission should therefore affirm a more precise rule: **Government must protect religious persons and institutions in their civil rights by strengthening the wall that guards both religious liberty and civil authority, not by building a bridge that invites each to enter the other's sphere.**

II. Social Benefit Alone Does Not Justify Government Promotion or Control

The report repeatedly emphasizes that religion benefits society. That claim is true in many respects. Religious communities help their followers to form moral habits and teach a duty beyond self-interest. They often use their resources to feed the hungry, care for the sick, strengthen families, comfort the grieving, support recovery from addiction, etc. But the fact that an activity produces social benefit does not, by itself, make that activity a proper object of government promotion, subsidy, supervision, or official endorsement.

The point is easiest to see with activities everyone recognizes as profoundly beneficial to society. Having and raising children is indispensable to the continuation of this nation. No community can survive without the birth, nurture, and formation of the next generation. Yet the state does not therefore force citizens to have children, assign spouses, prescribe family size, or treat procreation as a government program. The state may protect children from abuse, recognize parental rights and duties, provide neutral civil benefits, and secure equal protection under law, thus building a wall of protection

PII

around the family, so that the family is free to follow their convictions in matters of procreation and child raising. But it would be highly inappropriate to build a bridge, allowing the state to travel freely into that sacred space by converting these intimate and moral choices into decisions encouraged or compelled by the state.

Civil society contains many other institutions and practices that government may value without administering. Journalism is indispensable to democratic self-government, but government does not protect press freedom by funding favored newspapers, licensing acceptable viewpoints, or partnering with media organizations to produce approved public narratives. The practice of giving tithes and offerings benefits society in many ways, but government should not transform tithes and offerings into state-directed, state-encouraged, or state-measured moral performance.

The same principle applies with special force to religion. Religion may generate profound public benefits, but it is not a public utility. Its power comes from conviction—people acting out of sincerity. It cannot be made an instrument of civil administration without changing its character. Whenever religion is advanced by governmental favor or encouraged by civil incentives, the result is often not a more faithful people, but a more hypocritical one—individuals who outwardly profess religion for social acceptance, financial gain, political advantage, or civil benefit rather than from sincere conviction.

Christian history illustrates the danger. When Christianity gained the help of civil power under Constantine, the church gained influence but lost spiritual purity. Civil favor filled the churches with nominal Christians who brought all their heathen superstitions and practices into the church, resulting in compromise and corruption. The masses of the church had an outward profession without an inward experience. A genuine religious experience arises from sincere conviction and the voluntary exercise of conscience, not from governmental encouragement, persuasion, or monetary incentive.

The best way the government can protect socially valuable activities is by refusing to direct or control them. It protects speech not by prescribing correct speech, but by leaving citizens free to speak truth or error. It protects the press not by choosing approved publishers, but by refraining from censorship. It protects family life not by directing every parental judgment, but by protecting parental authority (which I am thankful the Commission addresses). Religious liberty should be protected in the same way: by securing freedom from coercion, discrimination, and civil penalty—not by making religion an object of official promotion because it benefits society.

PII

The Commission's report should therefore be revised to avoid reasoning from social value to government support. Many things are good for society precisely because they remain voluntary, independent, and outside the machinery of the state. Religion is one of them. Its independence is not a concession to secularism, but a condition of integrity.

Conclusion

The Commission is right to defend religious liberty against hostility, coercion, and discrimination. Religious believers and institutions should be protected in the free exercise of their faith, and no citizen should be treated as suspect because he or she lives according to sincere religious conviction.

But religious liberty is not preserved by replacing hostility with patronage. The proper role of civil government is to protect conscience, not to sponsor religion; to guard the church's freedom, not to encourage its mission; and to secure civil rights, not to build a bridge by which church and state take up one another's work.

Religion benefits society most when it remains voluntary, independent, and sincere. Many things that are essential to human flourishing lose their character when they become objects of government endorsement, promotion or control. Religion is one of them. Its purity and power do not come from civil favor, public subsidy, or official endorsement, but from conviction, conscience, and the work of God in the heart.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to revise its report to recommend that the President strengthen, rather than weaken, the wall between church and state. That wall is not an act of hostility toward religion. It is a protection for both religious liberty and civil government. It keeps Caesar's sword out of the hands of the church, and Christ's gospel out of Caesar's hands.

Sincerely,

Jonathon Cherne

Jonathon Cherne
Vice President
Church State Council

PII

From: Renee Schlesinger <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:39:41 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,
I am very concerned about what happened in the dark ages, when reformers left Europe because of persecution They came to this country which was blessed for having separation of church and state and religious freedom. Jesus did not interfere with the Romans He said "Render therefore to Ceasar the things that are Ceasar's and to God the things that are God's Luke 20:25

From: jfkorolsky <[redacted]>
To: RLCo<[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Judy Korolsky
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:40:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission: I would like to inform you that I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.
Thank you,
Judy Korolsky

From: Maribel Booth <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom Committee
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:41:10 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Freedom Committee:

Please be informed, I am grateful for all that our government leaders have done through the years to keep our nation free from laws that restrict our religious freedoms. I value the freedom to worship as my conscience dictates, and am not in favor of any legislation that removes the governmental barriers between church and state. Our nation is in good hands when the churches and government are separate from one another.

Maribel Booth

[redacted]

From: David Steingas <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - David Steingas
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:41:17 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Separation_of_Church_and_State_Letter_-_July_2026.pdf

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Please see the attached letter.

July 12, 2026
By Electronic Mail to: [redacted]

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – from David Steingas

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I have reviewed the recommendations made in the draft report of the Religious Liberty Commission as well as some of the arguments made to support the adoption of them. As a person of faith, I believe that making these changes will open the door to subsequent actions that will indeed weaken the protection of religious liberty in ways that cannot be foreseen. While the intent may be admirable and the recommendations not seem to be detrimental, allowing and promoting the intermixing of government authority and resources with religious organizations' activities presents the unmistakable possibility of abuse. Just as the faults of socialism become apparent because of the greed of an elite administrative class, and scientific research can be biased by the manner in which immense government funding is granted, so the encouragement of government involvement in religious affairs and religious involvement in government processes will lead to clever ways being devised which circumvent the very protections intended to be provided. The recommendations of the Commission, including the repeal of the Johnson Act, I believe will prove to be counterproductive to the objective of protecting religious freedom in the United States.

I have also reviewed the response made to the draft report by the Pillar of Freedom organization. I believe it raises valid concerns and provides adequate supporting arguments for not adopting the Commission's recommendations. I urge you to carefully consider the response of Pillar of Freedom, and will choose to withdraw your recommendations for changes in the relationship between government and religious organizations. I commend your intent to protect religious liberty, but do not believe that these changes will do so. Comprehensive enforcement of existing legal provisions will better serve to reach the stated objective.

Sincerely,

David Steingas
Karnack, Texas

From: Kenneth Avila <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Regarding the Draft Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:41:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

In reading through your draft report, it appears that the commission is of the opinion the there is no wall between church and state. In addition, the commission is now proposing a bridge between church and state.

I'm very concerned with this position being taken by the commission.

Historically speaking, when there is no wall between church and state, eventually we see oppression of peoples with a non-conforming view and that liberty of conscience becomes the victim.

This year we celebrated America's 250 birthday, 250 years of case law supporting the notion of a wall between church and state. I ask that you do not destroy what was so carefully preserved these 250 years, that is our individual liberty of conscience. A union of church and states will, over time, rollback this unique liberty that we have as Americans. A liberty so desired by those who live beyond our borders.

Therefore I ask that you remove language that promotes a union of church and state from the report.

Thank you.

Kenneth Avila
Cell:[redacted]
Email:[redacted]

From: Luis Villagomez <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:41:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

We all follow the same God but we want our rights to be protected to be able to rest the day we are suppose to and choose what religion we want to follow.

From: "Jon Davis" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Concern Statement
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:43:02 -0400
Importance: Normal

Jonathan Davis
[redacted]
7/12/2026

Dear Commission Members,

I am writing to submit a public comment regarding the draft report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission.

I am concerned that some of the recommendations could blur the traditional separation between government and religion. In particular, I am concerned about proposals involving government support for religious organizations and education, changes affecting political activity by religious institutions, and any policies that could result in preferential treatment for one faith tradition over others.

I support strong protections for religious liberty for people of all faiths and for those who do not practice a religion. I believe government should remain neutral in matters of religion and should protect the rights of all citizens equally.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Davis

From: V B <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:43:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty:

The wall that has separated church and state in the United States for the past 250 years has stood with strength. It has never wavered from a quake, and it has never crumbled. This wall is one of the foundational pillars on which America was founded. History books have revealed to us that those who fled Europe to escape religious tyranny, religious oppression, and religious persecution in the early years of this country, came to the shores of America to exercise religious freedom.

The true Holy Father, God Almighty, our heavenly Creator, does not force, nor coerce any religion onto humanity. Likewise, America's founding fathers did the same in establishing our country's Constitution. The wall that separates church and state in America is a security of freedom and protection of all creeds, all faiths, and all religions. The wall was erected for this purpose by the Country's earliest leaders, and it has been preserved for generations by those of us who call American soil their homeland. The wall of separation has and continues to serve this country and its citizens well, just as it was designed and intended. This is evidenced by the ongoing, overwhelming praise and worship of God, the Almighty Creator, by varying religious groups in our country.

Church and state separation has been a mighty fortress of the United States, and it should never be removed or replaced. Without this wall, America will no longer be America, Land of the Free. Instead, it will become America, Land of Forced Religion.

Respectfully, it is my request to the Commission to retract and nullify the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Report.

Sincerely,
United States Citizen
Advocate of the continued separation of church and state

From: Jerry & Donita Brownlee <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious freedom
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:44:23 -0400
Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone
We support separation of church and state according to our constitution. We do not agree to any change. The government should not be financially supporting churches or religious schools. The church should not be allowed to use donated funds for political purposes or agenda. History shows that when church and state join together to mandate rules, religious persecution follows.
Sincerely
Jerry and Donita Brownlee

From: Villagomez Cano <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Protect our religious freedom please
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:45:19 -0400
Importance: Normal

I cannot find the words to express the damage that would proceed at the establishment of church and state union by the removal of religious freedoms . I plead that our rights may be upheld. The rights of conscience should be protected. May this short and direct message convey my stand in this urgent and sensitive matter.

From: Samuel Solero <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] The separation of Church and State is clearly implied in the Constitution.
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:46:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I'm writing as an ordained minister and US citizen, asking you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the protective separation of church and state afforded by the First Amendment. This is happening by using government money to fund religious activities favoring Christianity, promoting the false narrative that our nation's founders intended for Christianity to be given favored legal status, and by seeking to repeal the Johnson Amendment. While I fully support you in challenging those who would use government and education to promote secularism and materialism, and to oppose religion, this does not justify turning the tables and using government to promote religious views. It is lawful for government to protect a citizen's free exercise of religion, and protect institutions seeking to disseminate religion, but not lawful for government to favor, promote our financially support religion, not even Christianity.

The first amendment of our national Constitution wisely prevents our governmental entities from respecting (much less promoting) the establishment of any particular religion—or from denying our citizens the free exercise thereof. These constitutional protections were not written and voted on by atheists, so-called liberals or communists, but by our nation's founding fathers. Your commission is not only objecting to Jefferson's interpretation of the amendment as a protective wall between between church and state, which is based on solid experience and history, but in danger of repeating what secularists have achieved in the past, the highjacking of Government to promote their worldview. The ends do not justify the means. Please reconsider promoting views or laws that would weaken the necessary separation of church and state as codified in the First Amendment.

Most sincerely,
Samuel Soler
Whitwell, TN

From: Carolina Perry <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Topic-Religious Liberty Commission Report-Carolina Crounse
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:46:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

My fellow Americans,

As a Christian and an American, I urge you to consider the matters before us regarding religious liberty and the separation of church and state. Though it may seem that directing the nation toward Christian values is a God-ordained endeavor, we must proceed with great care.

God has given every person the free will to choose for himself or herself whom to worship. History has shown us time and again that when the state enforces worship or legislates morality, evil often ensues. Our own Roger Williams stated, “The unknowing zeal of Constantine and other emperors did more hurt to Christ Jesus’s crown and kingdom than the raging fury of the most bloody Neros.” This reminds us that using the force of government to promote Christianity has never advanced the true kingdom of God. Instead, it has often devolved into persecution and violence.

Christ Himself declared, “ My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight… but now is my kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36, KJV).

We must stand for freedom, as our Founding Fathers did. In doing so, we must not compel prayer, require displays of the Ten Commandments, mandate worship on a specific day, or impose any other religious practice upon the people.

Let us uphold our Constitution and protect the right of every individual to worship God if they so choose and to follow the dictates of conscience. God does not accept worship that is forced or coerced, but only that which is offered freely out of love.

Let us simply do good, follow the Golden Rule, and uphold the principles of liberty that our Founding Fathers fought to preserve.

Sincerely,

Carolina Crounse

From: Max Shurtliff <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission, separation of Church and State:
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:46:53 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Blank_4.pages

Sent from my iPad

Letter to whom it may concern in reference to the recent President's Trump panel on religious liberty commission finding and report:

7/12/2026

From:
Max H Shurtliff
PII

I agreed with the Panel's confirmation that the Constitution of the United States guarantees liberty of conscience and the right to worship as this conscience dictates. I believe that this is what has made this country so great for the last 250 years!

However I do not see why we or this panel along with President Trumps desire to rewrite or do away with the Idea of separation of the Church and State! Pretty clear to me that when the State controls the Church we have Communism or socialism or Marxism etc. On the other hand when the Church controls the State, we Inevitably have persecution of other non dominate faiths by the State at the hands of the Church! Examples: Islam, Romanism, etc which results in civil penalties for one's exercising their right of conscience! Either way the result is persecution, genicide, Loss of life,etc. ie. "The Dark Ages". Lets not forget What History Teaches us! Millions of "Christians lost their lives during the period! Seems to me that the world is a better place when we have true freedom of conscience and Neither of these Entities controls the other!

Let's not forget what this country was all about and that many that came to this county were trying to escape religious persecution! I hope that we leave the constitution alone as it stands! They called themselves protestants! Lets not forget what they were protesting against! they were escaping the Church's trying to control freedom of conscience via the the Governments power throughout Europe! The wall is there for a reason, lets leave it intact for the next 250 years, Lord willing!

I like this George Washington Quote: Every man who conducts himself as a good citizen, is accountable alone to God for his religious faith and should be protected in worshiping God according to the dictates of his own conscience"

Sincerely: Max H Shurtliff--concerned and proud citizen of the United States of America

From: Doug Barnett <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:47:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to respectfully express my concerns over first of the twelve opportunities outlined in your report. I am aware of others writing to you who have made a succinct case that separation of church and state was, in fact, the explicit intent of many of the contributors to the Constitution, and I agree with that conclusion. Additionally, recall that it was for the very purpose of escaping a church state union that the Mayflower carried the first pilgrims to our shores. While the early settlers succumbed to the same intoxicating folly of relying on civil force to sustain their religious convictions, key aspects of the original sentiments that motivated the separatists were later refined, ennobled and protected by the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause of the Constitution. I would also like to call attention to the eventual outcomes that history bears record to be the consistent result of church and state union. The Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the Puritans, the centuries of Papal persecution of Protestants, and more all testify that civil power used to compel the conscience invariably leads to tyranny. This tyranny of past ages will certainly be repeated if we allow the protections against it in the Constitution to be weakened.

This topic is covered explicitly and comprehensively in the book “The Great Controversy” by Ellen White. A video series summarizing it can be found here https://greatcontroversycard.com/, and I respectfully urge you to read or watch this resource if you have not already.
Sincerely,
Philip Barnett

From: Carolyn Tandy <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:50:45 -0400
Importance: Normal
Inline-Images: IMG_7686.jpg

All Photos Reels

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church & State," Jefferson wrote.

If you believe as I do, that government has no authority to tell you what to believe, or how to worship, and that government lacks authority over religion, please take a moment to send an email to the Commission on or before Monday, July 13, expressing your concern. [redacted].

Sincerely, Dr. Robert and Carolyn Tandy
Sent from my iPhone

From: Andrew kabush <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Real religious liberty
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:52:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

Our nation exists for a reason, throughout the dark ages of europe, Christians and other faiths suffered terrible persecution, in a desperate effort to worship God as they believed, many brave Christians crossed the ocean to found many of the colonies that became the united states of America.They started a movement that would eventually spread beyond America, that would finally make clear that everyone has a God given right to worship as their conscious is led.

But lets take a minute to study why those first pilgrims came here, in the nation's of europe Christian Nationalism reigned, to the point that pope's deposed kings, and sent inquisition to kill millions, in a world where the church led the state only persecution followed, everywhere it was tried, and no faith was exempt, from jews, to mulslims, from Protestants to waldensians, and from orthodox to anabaptists, Real religious liberty must keep the safety of a barrier between church and state!

Pilgrim founders all teh way back to Roger Williams have rightly warned of the danger, we must not sacrifice real liberty for the appearance of it via appeasement.

I believe we are right to protect the beliefs of all faiths so far as they do not conflict with the God given rights recognized in our constitution, and i urge this commission and the department of justice to not betray the constitutions establishment clause and make the grave mistake of removing the vital separation of church and state!

Signed Andrew Kabush of Marsing Idaho.

From: Arvo Kanna <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Arvo Kanna
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:52:18 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 12, 2026

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

The issue of the separation of church and state is a very important issue to me, as a person of faith. I believe it is one of the motivations for and one of the essential parts of the ideas behind the Constitution of the United States. The founders wanted separation of powers, did not want a king, nor a religious power to answer to and be controlled by, but rather wanted to allow people to follow their own consciences under the 10-commandment law of God, and whatever other moral sense they had under conviction. I believe the Biblical record, when not under theocracy, supports the idea of religious freedom, following the 10 commandments, allowing the state to enforce the principles of the last 6 commandments of the Decalogue, but leaving the first 4 commandments to the individual, since God does not force worship to Himself or a relationship with Him. Jesus did, however, tell those who tried to entrap Him, to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's, endorsing a separation of church and state allegiances and responsibilities.

I went on two Protestant Reformation tours, one in the United Kingdom, and another on mainland Europe within the last 2 years, and saw the history of the tendency for religious persecution, both on the Roman Catholic side, and on the Protestant side, when the state was involved in enforcement of religious laws and dogmas.

I am aware of the history of the early religious intolerance among the early American colonies, such as among the Puritans. It took awhile for the religious people to realize the intolerances of the Middle Ages from the universal church, and even during the Protestant Reformation among the Protestants themselves, were not conducive to a society with freedom of speech, freedom of religion, or even economic freedom.

Human nature did not change, so our founders realized they needed checks and balances, along with this freedom, though not based on a state religion.
Also, many of the religious laws of the colonies and later the states were eventually removed, in favor of freedom, while still enforcing the civil laws based on the last 6 commandments of God's 10 commandments, but not involving a state-supported church.

My paternal grandfather was condemned to death (with his wife and children) in Estonia, under the rule of the USSR during World War II, because he was a pastor, four different times, but his sentence was delayed each time because he was also doing medical work with doctors in the local hospital, and I am sure due to God's protection. Many people were executed, but the plans for killing dissenters and religious people were cut short, when the Germans overcame the Russians suddenly in Estonia. My grandfather was eventually allowed to escape to Sweden, since he and his family were Swedish. He still kept receiving death threats from communists, so after 4 years he was sent to South America as a missionary, with his family.

After 7 years of service in Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, he was told to go on furlough, but several embassies in European Countries let him know that if he set foot in Europe, the communists had said that they would kill him. Therefore, his denomination sent him to the United States for his furlough, which is how my father ended up going to school here in the USA and eventually becoming a naturalized US citizen.

My mother's family escaped Cuba, and came to the USA, before Castro solidified his power as an open communist, when he was previously pretending not to be a communist.
Clearly, I can see how atheistic secularism in my family's history was at war with God and His people of faith.

Obviously, I value the freedom of speech and freedom of religion that we enjoy in this country, given my family's background. My father was a science teacher, and would tell me many stories about his experiences, and those of his family. He ingrained in me the many shortcomings of socialism and the evils of communism, even though they supposedly had lofty ideals. I believe it is important to remember the ideas of communism that "the end justifies the means" should never be allowed to become the motive force behind passing of laws that favor a particular religious group or denomination, no matter how high the goal, because human nature will corrupt these ideals.

My own denomination had members who kept the seventh-day Sabbath, back in the late 1800's (e.g., 1879-1889) when some were fined and/or put in prison, or sometimes put in chain gangs, for working on Sunday, often just at their homes, and thus for violating the Sunday/blue laws.

I do appreciate the Commission's ideas about the encroachment of secularism on the freedom of religion in this country, and the exclusion of some good things of a religious nature from public life has been inappropriate.

Because of the dangers of entanglement of government funds with religion, or politics with religious practice, I favor the enforcement, NOT repeal, of the Johnson Amendment. I do NOT favor the expansion of government funding of religious organizations that engage in political activities, nor government support of religious education or religious clubs.

I believe the idea that there is no support for separation of church and state in the Constitution is not based on a proper understanding of the history of our country's founding, even though the founders were largely religious people, many of them ministers. The idea of separation of church and state brought forth clearly by Roger Williams in the founding of Rhode Island, and the states who followed suit, such as New Jersey, Delaware and Pennsylvania, show this was not contrary to the Constitution, and indeed the Bible gives the basis for separation of church and state. I remember the admonition of God through the prophet Samuel, and also even through Moses, of the dangers of a king. And thousands of years of human history show the dangers of the state enforcing religious practice. Free money corrupts morals, and government money always has "strings" attached, making a tendency for one denomination or religious group ("non-profit") to be eventually favored above another.

In summary, I object to the idea that a wall of separation of church and state does not exist, because I believe there is adequate evidence that the founders of our country DID intend that wall to be maintained.
I object to the repealing and lack of enforcement of the Johnson Amendment.
And, I object to the funding of religious non-profit activities, and the funding of religious education and religious clubs.

Thank you for giving us, as citizens, a chance to voice our opinions.

Sincerely,

Arvo Kanna, MD
Greeneville, TN

From: Paula Wagenfeld <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on America's First Freedom
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:53:12 -0400
Importance: Normal

I feel the First Amendment clearly addresses the concept of separation of church and state. It's quite a simple idea.
I object to Recommendation #9 to repeal the Johnson Amendment.

From: "Jack Korolsky" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Jack Korolsky has sent you a Secure Email with subject "PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Jack Korolsky"
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:53:18 -0400
Importance: Normal

BusinessLogo

Jack Korolsky from [redacted] has sent you a Secure Email using Delivery Trust by Identillect Technologies.

Message Subject: **PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Jack Korolsky**

To view the secure message/respond securely, please **click on this link**.

Sincerely,

Jack Korolsky
[redacted]

Alternate Method To Access Your Secure Email:
If you are unable to open external links, please navigate to the webpage ww2.identillect.com/myemail and enter the following code when prompted: 5FDA4E5C6E7EF11186F3DA63E8590420

NOTE: Please Do Not reply directly to this email notification: Secure replies can be accomplished by navigating to the provided link above and replying in the secure web portal

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This Secure Email was sent via Delivery Trust from Identillect Technologies

From: Kenneth Sjoren <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Seperation of church and state-Kenneth G. Sjoren DDS
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:53:27 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of the religious liberty commission:

Please reconsider your position of building a bridge between church and state instead of maintaining the wall of separation. History tells us that when church and state unite,loss of freedom and persecution is always the result. Why would we want this to happen in this wonderful country that I love? Once freedom is gone it is very difficult to recover it.

You claim that this is a Christian nation. That means you should follow the teachings of Christ. But Christ clearly taught the separation of church and state. In Mark 12:17 Christ said,"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." This statement clearly shows the separation of church and state. Also, in John 18:36 Christ said, "My kingdom is not of this world." So why are you trying to make the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the world, or state, one and the same?

In closing; I love this country for the freedom it has given me, please don't change that.

Sincerely;

Kenneth G. Sjoren DDS

Hermiston, Oregon

From: Basanthi Thavamani <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:53:56 -0400
Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.

From: brent shakespeare <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment- Religious Liberty Commission Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:53:59 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 12, 2026

To whom it may concern,

1) "Religious Liberty" is rooted in the Bible, especially the teachings of Jesus.

2) Whereas, Jesus announced that His church would be a spiritual "kingdom"- He told His church and followers not to look for earthly power to mark its coming (John 3:3; Luke 17:21);

3) Whereas, Jesus never decided legal or political questions- He refused to interfere with earthly matters- and He never told His followers to;

4) Whereas, Jesus' does not depend upon any earthly support for His kingdom or church (John 18:36);

5) Whereas, Jesus never asked His followers to rule through legal laws, enforced by human authority;

6) Whereas, the Pharisees and priests in Jesus' day desired to establish an earthly kingdom and temporal power and authority- but Jesus rejected this;

7) Whereas, Jesus was tempted in the wilderness with the "kingdoms of the world"- He refused to have them, because the solution to man's problems are spiritual, not temporal;

8) Whereas, Jesus resisted ruling through Political- Governmental Institutions (Luke 4:5-8);

9) Whereas, Jesus' kingdom is the implanting of His nature in humanity- it can never be established with political or legislative powers (John 1:12,13);

10) Whereas, Jesus' kingdom does not use the force of laws, court decisions, executive orders or commissions- but is only from voluntary. Service (Matt. 11:28-30; Rev. 3:20);

11) Whereas, history teaches us that when the church and state compel men, only hypocrisy is the result- Jesus only uses voluntary service and the constraint of love;

12) Whereas, the work of God's kingdom does not lie with those who desire earthly support from rulers and laws- rather, spiritual truths that will transform the heart (Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 5:20);

13) Whereas, Jesus separated Caesar from God (the State from the Church)- showing that they have completely different roles and functions;

14) The State ("Caesar") and the Church ("God's") have principles that are Mutually Exclusive. (Matt. 22:21)

15) Whereas, Jesus taught His followers the complete separation of church and state- and that the government can never rightly require anything that is due to God. (Matt. 22:21);

16) Whereas, God allows freedom of conscience to all men- everyone can choose to believe or not believe in Him;

17) Whereas, "Almighty God hath created the mind free; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishment or burthens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy

and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the Holy author of our religion" (Thomas Jefferson, Religious Statute for Religious Freedom);

18) Whereas, "all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities. (Thomas Jefferson, Virginia Statute for Religious) Freedom);

19) Whereas, "it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." (Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia);

20) Whereas, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." (First Amendment of the United States, Religion Clauses);

21) Whereas, the First Amendment was made to protect the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mahometan, the Hindoo, and infidel of every denomination." (Thomas Jefferson);

Because of these reasons, we reject the idea of "building bridges" between church and state; funding private schools with public funding; placing religious displays on public property; and using Christianity in the military. Thank you for your time.
Brent & Nina Shakespeare

From: Natalie's email <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:54:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 12, 2026

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am an American citizen. My maternal grandparents, my parents, and I were all born here, with the exception of my paternal grandfather, who emigrated from Greece in the early 1900's to America and came to Ellis Island to escape the war in Greece. He was raised Greek Orthodox, however, once he was here in America, he had the freedom to read the Bible for himself, was deeply convicted, gave his life to Christ and became a Protestant. I am grateful to God that America is a land of religious freedom and that my grandfather had the freedom to read the Bible of his own accord and follow the convictions of the Holy Spirit.

Three months after I was born, my father moved to Greece for 10 years to be a pastor of a Protestant church. During the first ten years of my life, as I lived in Greece, I traveled to over 20 countries because of my father's work and his love for travel. I have been to Muslim countries, Buddhist countries, and Hindu countries, and even at a young age I could clearly see the distinction that freedom of speech, freedom to bear arms, and freedom of religion made in the people and individuals in America vs the other countries I had traveled to that did not have those freedoms. There was a hope, a peace in the American people that I did not see in other countries. It was a breath of fresh air.

During the time that my father pastored the protestant church in Greece the Greek Orthodox church had our phones tapped; they sent police to our house to arrest my father with false accusations. I remember my father holding me in his arms in the front yard of our rural house, with the lights from the police car lighting up the night sky with flashing red and blue lights. The two police officers, guns in their holsters, tried to intimidate my father with false accusations. They did not arrest him that night. The Greek Orthodox church harassed and tried accusing my father of many things, simply because he was protestant. They ended up taking him to court in the mid 1980's, which became one of Greece's first religious freedom cases. My father was seen as not guilty and acquitted of all the false charges, but this experience left an indelible mark on me and a deep respect and belief in religious liberty and freedom.

My parents moved back to America when I was 10 yrs old and I have lived here since. I currently teach Nursing at my local community college and have the pleasure of teaching students from a variety of various religious backgrounds, the importance for advocating for patient's rights, one of those being the right to their religion and religious practices. I teach a whole unit on equity and advocacy for patients, where I go over the importance of respecting and advocating for our patients' various religious needs and preferences while they are in the hospital.

Religious freedom is deeply imbedded in my family history, experience, and even my own career path. Religious freedom cannot be achieved in America without the clear separation of Church and State. I first hand experienced the prejudince in Greece, although another Christian nation, they targeted and persecuted my father because he was a Greek Protestant and not Greek Orthodox. I am deeply concerned with the Religious

Liberty Commission's proposal to bridge religion and State. America was founded by Christians, but it was founded to be a country with religious freedom and reflect Christ's love and character, which is freedom of choice. Christ's kingdom is one of love, attraction, and conviction, not of force or compulsion. Love for God cannot be mandated or regulated. As the Bible so beautifully describes our Heavenly Father, He is a God of love, and love does not force.

I have deep concerns and objections to the funding of religious non-profit activities, education, and clubs in public campuses. Although I want to start one in the college that I teach at, I don't think we should have government funding towards any religious club. I sincerely believe and have faith that God will honor the work to be done, and He will provide a way, but I do not think this is something the Government should be involved in.

I sincerely pray and respectfully request that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced and that there is a distinct delineation and separation between the church's political activities, the strict separation of church and state be enforced, and that the U.S. government stays completely neutral with regards to religion, with no preference or bias towards any one religion because that is the beauty of being American, is we are free to enter into a relationship with God or not.

Thank you for your time, and may God bless you and America and guide you with His Spirit of wisdom and truth.

Natalie Yialelis

From: Bradley Lamkin <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Commission Comment
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:54:17 -0400
Importance: Normal

I 100% stand behind the report's most unequivocal recommendation that the DOJ aggressively tear down the so called wall separating church and state. Our government needs to return to promoting 'an originalist understanding' of how the Constitution sees the relationship between religion and government, wherein there is no wall except to keep the government out of the Church's business, not the other way around. This is required because, as our founders argued, a self-governing nation requires a moral and virtuous citizenry to thrive, and religion is the primary source of that morality. Thank you for all your efforts in this matter.

From: Beth Wienhoff <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:54:22 -0400
Importance: Normal

Church and State must not be combined.We know historically that this always causes persecution.

From: "Jon Davis" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Jonathan Davis
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:55:19 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am deeply concerned about the Commission's recent recommendations, which I believe threaten our constitutional liberties.
The two main proposals stand out as particularly alarming: the repeal of the Johnson Amendment, which would further politicize America's churches, and the expansion of public funding for religious organizations to engage in explicitly religious activities.
Both recommendations undermine the fundamental separation of church and state that is clearly protected by our Constitution. I urge you to reject these changes and uphold the principles that keep government and religion separate.

Jonathan Davis
[redacted]

From: Leland Friesen <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:55:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Regarding the contents of the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, June 2026, and as a citizen, verteran, and person of faith, I am deeply troubled by the Commission's proposal to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge."

This wall was built by believers to keep the church free, not by secularists to restrict religion. This bridge you are proposing is contrary to liberty and opens the door for government funding and political influence to pour into the religious sphere, forcing churches to compete for grants and answer to politicians instead of to God. History demonstrates that the blending of church and state is detrimental to both.

I urge you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken this separation - specifically, using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment. When churches engage in partisan politics or accept government funding, they unfortunately inherit political corruption. Separation protects faith, which is precisely why religion has remained strong in our country. My brothers have fought and died to protect this "breach" or "bridge" from forming.

Please maintain the separation of church and state - that is what keeps both free and America great!

Thabk you,

~Leland Friesen

From: Delynne Shepard <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Dr. D. Shepard
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:55:53 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,
As a spiritual, God-fearing individual, it was with some alarm that read over your recommendations as put forth in the Commission's Draft Report relating to the separation of church and state. While I agree with your observations concerning the increasing acceptance of this ideology as descriptive of the import of the 1st Ammendment despite the exact phrase being absent from the Constitution, I am deeply concerned with your suggestion that because the specific words are missing their meaning can in no way be understood or implied by the words that are indeed found there in that historic document. That is to say, the fact that a certain set of words are not present does not in any way negate the possibility of their meaning being present and their import conveyable through a different set of words. The English language is not lacking in word choice and, I'd dare say, in nearly all situations there exist multiple ways of saying the same thing. To say that government involving itself with church and church involving itself with government is not ruled out by the 1st Ammendment just because the verbiage "separation of Church and State" is not present, is like saying that one can walk past the familiar sign outside of a restaurant stating "No shirt, no shoes, no service", sit down at a table partially unclothed and expect to be served because they're holding a bag containing their shirt and shoes. The sign doesn't say explicitly that one must be wearing their shirt and shoes and, apparently, the meaning can't be implied. Such a train of thought would be viewed by most ably-minded individuals as ludicrous. Let's not base a re-interpretation of what is undoubtably the single most important and defining document pertaining to our Nation and its laws based largely on semantics.
Moving on, let's agree that while "separation of Church and State" is present in the meaning of the 1st Ammendment, we also recognize that, over the years, this idea has become an all-encompassing umbrella, of sorts, used to push the boundaries of how wide and varied our interpretation is of how the Establishment and Prohibition Clauses are applied within the U.S. judicial system. While the risk of the pendulum swinging towards too broad of an interpretation exists, so too does it exist that it will swing towards too narrow of an interpretation. It's like a Venn Diagram, with a small circle containing the 2 Clauses lying completely inside a larger circle of Separation of Church and State. All actions, rulings, laws, and interpretations that are upheld by the Establishment and/or Prohibition Clauses will also be upheld by the Separation of Church and State. But not everything that has in the past been upheld by the Separation of Church and State pass the Establishment and/or Prohibition Clauses. In other words, the ideology of a Separation of Church and State has created a sort of buffer between the narrower strict interpretation of the 2 Clauses and a wider looser interpretation of no involvement of the Government in religion and religion in Government. My fear and concern comes down to this: if we do away with, or even chip away at, the larger circle of Separation of Church and State, will the part that underlies the smaller circle of the 2 Clauses remain? If it remains, the Clauses are resting on a strong and impenetrable base. But if it disappears with the larger circle, it severely weakens that base and jeopardizes the continuation of freedom of religion in America. Personally, and I sincerely hope this would be true for all Americans, including each of you as Members of this Commission, I would feel much more secure keeping the buffer of Separation of Church and State in place than to risk future damage to the 1st Ammendment and its 2 clauses.
Thank you for your thoughtful consideration, and may God in His goodness continue to bless each and every one of us,
Dr. D. Shepard

Sent from my iPhone

From: Thomas Sherwin <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RLC
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:58:36 -0400
Importance: Normal

Please do not breakdown that the wall that separates church and state. This doctrine provides the free exercise of faith in our country for over 200 years. This wall is made of many " bricks" that have been placed by the First Ammendment. Do not weaken this freedom!

From: Natasha Nebblett <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Natasha Dysinger
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:59:23 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I want to express my concern over your draft proposal. I do strongly support the fact that religious liberty is incredibly important, to me as an individual American, to the church, to all religions, and to America as a nation. It is one of our most fundamental and important rights, and I appreciate the Commission's attention to this matter.

Here are some of my concerns:

1. While I support the commission's concern over secularism being protected by the state (it should not be), turning the table and having the state support the church instead will do exactly what the state's support of an ideology has already done - restrict liberty. If the state's support of secularism has restricted the liberty of Christians, the state's support of Christianity will inevitably result in it restricting the liberty of other, or minority, ideologies or religions. As a Christian I stand for my own rights to worship according to my conscience, as well as for every other person.

2. Any church that needs the support of the state is a weak church - a church that lacks the power of God behind it. The early Christian church had no state support, but it turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). We have many centuries of examples of what happened when the church did get state support; and not just one faith tradition, but various ones. Inevitably they restricted the liberty of anyone that did not share their perspective. This is fundamentally un-American. The state should not prop up a church that cannot deliver on its own life changing promises anyway.

3. State money never goes without any strings attached, and should not. The accountability and oversight of the state is only rational and appropriate where tax dollars are concerned. The flip side of that coin though is that the state absolutely should not have oversight of the church, of faith, of conscience. Please keep tax dollars away from faith organizations, and maintain the current format of grants for NGOs.

I will summarize. The idea that the separation of church and state is unimportant is incorrect, and it is important for all Americans and for people of faith specifically that the separation be maintained. However removing direct governmental support for secularism as an ideology is warranted - that I definitely support.

Thank you,
Natasha Dysinger

From: Kelly Matta <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State - Kelly Matta
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:00:04 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,
I've been a God fearing, Bible believing christian for over 50 years. I am deeply concerned about the steps being taken at this time. Please reconsider and keep the separation of church and state like our founders intended it! We must protect our Freedom of Conscience. This is a mistake to go down this path and involve government in church. I completely agree with the Pillars of Freedom's response. I urge you to consider the pleas and desires of many people in our great nation.
Thank you,
Kelly Matta
Sent from my iPhone

From: Paul Dysinger <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Paul Dysinger
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:00:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

As a Christian man of faith, I am deeply concerned with the recommendations that have been put forward and do not agree with the government funding Religious institutions or education. I am also not in support of removing the Johnson Ammendment.

If there is one thing history has made clear, it is the pathway nations will walk down when the church and the state unite.

It was because of (to a large degree) the detrimental effects of the union of church and state that America was founded. History has proven that when religion has the opportunity to use the power of the State, persecution will inevitably follow. Please do not mix church and state. I do not approve of the blending of church and state and am apposed to the idea of creating a bridge instead of a wall.

Please do not continue on a path that will weaken the separation that has blessed this country with such freedom. It is because of this separation that the church has had the freedom to grow, thrive, and bless the world. Blending the power of the government with church matters will not only negatively impact our country, but it will also ultimately negatively impact the church, the bride of Christ, and her mission in this world.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter and I sincerely appeal to you to reconsider the path that is currently being recommended.

Sincerely,
Paul Dysinger

From: Kimberly Conley <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:02:19 -0400
Importance: Normal

Hello,

We are very concerned about the statements made against the First Amendment which prevents the government from establishing religion or forbiding the free exercise of religion according to conscience. We see examples of countries where this combination of government and religion has occurred in out own time, such as Iran with Sharia law, and North Korea with communism, which most Americans recognize as “anti-American.” History also has shown the folly of combing government power with religious belief to enforce worship-related laws. Please do not undermine our First Amendment rights!

Matt Boyko and Kimberly Conley Boyko

From: Ruth Campbell <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment on the Commission's Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:03:07 -0400
Importance: Normal

Hi Religious Liberty Commission Members:

I hope you all are well. As a citizen of the United States of America, I request that you do not weaken and dismantle the separation of church and state by proposing certain recommendations. Below are a couple examples.

1. Repealing the Johnson Amendment.

2. Singling out one religion for special government protection.

When there is no separation of church and state, inevitably the result is religious persecution as shown in our history, Rome's history (Dark Ages), etc.

May God's will be done now and forever more.

God loves you 😁.

The time is always right to do what is right. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. Edmund Burke

From: Sharon Follett <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: Re: Automatic reply: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:03:14 -0400
Importance: Normal

😌

On Sun, Jul 12, 2026, 10:24 PM RLC (OASG) <[redacted]> wrote:

> Thank you for your email! Please be aware public comments to the Commission may be subject to public inspection. Please do not include personally identifiable information such as addresses, birth dates, or other details you may wish to keep private.

From: Idania Mendoza <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:03:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

Please keep church and state separate. Give to Ceasar what is Ceasar's and to God what is God.

Thank you.

Idania Mendoza

Sent from my iPhone

From: [redacted] PII
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted] PII >
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:05:43 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty:

One of the pillars of American strength has been religious freedom. It has been the catalyst that has brought us through 250 years of division, oppression and persecution.

The 1st Amendment clause prohibits the government from establishing a state religion. Religious liberty is our fundamental human right to hold without government coercion, discrimination, or interference.

Wholeheartedly, I strongly recommend that the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty abstain from the recommendations outlined in its report.

Sincerely,

United States Citizen

From: Robert Shepard <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - R. Shepard
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:06:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,
After reading your Draft Report, I have the following comments. As a Christian, I am in agreement with seeking ways to allow military personnel to practice their faith and religious conscientious convictions. I believe the First Amendment of the United States Constitution establishes the principle of the separation of church and state, even though the phrase is not used. Thomas Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptists uses the phrase "a wall of separation between Church and State." Although written over ten years after the ratification of the Constitution, this phrase explicitly refers to the First Amendment, as he states in his previous sentence. My fear and concern is that the commission's recommendations to remove the idea of the separation of church and state would be the first step towards opening the way for further steps to erode, or even erase in its entirety, the First Amendment. If we lose this freedom, I believe we lose everything, including the prosperity with which this nation has been blessed. This country would become like other nations that do not afford the freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment. Please carefully consider any future decisions involving religious liberty and uphold the anti-establishment and anti-prohibition
clauses of the First Amendment.
Sincerely,
R. Shepard
Sent from my iPhone

From: Linda Mammen <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty draft
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:06:45 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Separation of church and state is important to protect freedom. Our forefathers saw the importance and wisdom of this because of the incredible damage that history had demonstrated when church and state combined. Much of the world does not follow this and the results can be seen by the oppression of the people that live in these countries. This is one of the pillars of our government that has protected us and resulted in the greatness of the United States of America as it is today. A nation like none other in history.

So please keep church and state completely separate.

Sincerely,

Linda Mammen, MD

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:08:19 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to submit my formal public comment expressing total opposition to the recommendations put forward in the June 2026 draft report. Rather than protecting true religious freedom, this document outlines an alarming blueprint to systematically break down the constitutional wall between church and state, while simultaneously narrowing the religious liberties of everyday Americans.
True religious freedom requires the government to remain strictly neutral. By attempting to elevate a singular, preferred religious viewpoint to a position of federal backing, this report actively undermines the First Amendment.
I urge the Commission to completely reject the following recommendations before a final report is issued:

1. The Subversion of the Johnson Amendment
The recommendation to eliminate or weaken the Johnson Amendment directly threatens the independence of both our political system and our houses of worship. Allowing tax-exempt religious institutions to funnel money into political campaigns and endorse candidates turns sacred spaces into partisan tools. This narrows religious liberty by forcing churchgoers into politically divided congregations and inappropriately subsidizes political speech through tax-exempt dollars.

2. The Diversion of Public Funds to Religious Education
The report's push to expand federal voucher programs and direct public tax dollars to religious private schools is a direct violation of the Establishment Clause. Public **funds must support public education, which serves all children equally. Forcing taxpayers to fund religious instruction—including schools whose doctrines they may fundamentally disagree with—is a severe infringement on individual freedom of conscience.**

3. The Weaponization of "Conscience Protections" to Discriminate
The report seeks to radically expand "Free Exercise" rights for corporations, government-funded agencies, and healthcare providers at the direct expense of individual citizens.
In Healthcare:Expanding medical refusal clauses allows providers to deny essential care to patients based on religious dogma, compromising patient safety and autonomy.
In Social Services:Allowing taxpayer-funded adoption and foster care agencies to reject qualified families based on sexual orientation or religion is state-sanctioned discrimination.
In the Workplace:Broadening corporate religious rights allows private business owners to override federal labor protections, stripping employees of their reproductive healthcare benefits and civil rights.

4. The Exclusion of Minority Faiths and Non-Religious Americans
Religious liberty must be absolute and equal for all people. The draft report focuses almost exclusively on protecting majority Christian institutions while largely ignoring the documented rise of discrimination against Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist Americans, as well as the rapidly growing secular population. By favoring one religious tradition, the report inherently narrows the freedom of all others.

Conclusion
The recommendations in this report do not defend liberty; they attempt to create a dangerous union between church and state that historical precedent proves will lead to oppression, division, and the erosion of minority rights. I demand that the Commission uphold the strict separation of church and state—the very framework that has allowed diverse religious expressions to thrive peacefully in America for over two centuries.

Sincerely,
Berkely
Berkely Morin Sent from my iPhone

From: Alicia Bell <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Alicia Bell
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:08:39 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:
Thank you for your service to our United States and to our President Donald Trump. You all have put in time, energy, and resources to research and produce a document to guide our country in the defence of Christian and Jewish liberty.
I beg you to consider the dangers of religion dictating to civil governments what is or is not acceptable worship. Many countries both in the past and presently are seeking to protect their citizens from preceived errors of doctrines. The problems arise when personal conviction clashes with acceptable doctrine. Weither it is coming from Hindus in India persecuting non-Hindus. Athiests in communist countries persecuting non-athiests, Catholics ruled countries persecuting non-Catholics or Angicans in England (history) persecuting non-Anglicans. Persecution happens where the government has embraced a belief system to the exclusion of others. It is like unintended consequences. So in light of this observation my request is to allow religions be supported by their own believers and allow politics be reserved to the public sphere. Thank you for your consideration.
Sincerely,
Alicia Bell,
Florence, AL

From: Eric Davis <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:08:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

I was trouble to read that the religious liberty commission wants to replace the Wall of separation between church and state with a “bridge.” With respect , I do not agree or support this change. As a person of faith, I find the idea alarming.

I would like to keep my religious freedom, exactly the way it is for the exact reason the separation was created in the first place. I hold dearly to my believe that as an American, i have full religious liberty and freedom without any government say.
Thank you for concidering my concerns.

Eric Davis

Sent from AT&T Yahoo Mail on Android

From: Denise Moore <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Denise Moore
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:09:02 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report with building a "bridge" between church and state. I am opposed to using government money to fund religious activities.

You recognize that "Religious Liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength." Roger Williams understood this and was instrumental in creating a wall of separation between the church and the state. Rhode Island was the first to adopt this and with time, all the colonies agreed that this was best. Keeping the wall of separation protects both religious and civil freedom.

I also oppose repealing the Johnson Amendment and instead request it be fully enforced.

There are many examples throughout history that show that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. There is evidence of it today in other countries and is the reason for many originally coming to this country and others continuing to come here today.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Denise Moore
Post Falls, ID

From: Adam Crabbe <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE- ADAM CRABBE
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:09:39 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I believe that Church and State should forever remain separate.

Throughout history, the combination of Church and State has led to dictatorships and innocent lives lost.

Political power corrupts the church and the church loses it's mission. It becomes an oppressive power and uses force to reach its goals.

Freedoms of individuals are lost. Freedom of conscience, at some point, will no longer be regarded by those in power.
Religious liberty is destroyed by those claiming to uphold it.

Funds supplied by the government to religious organizations becomes a controlling device by which those in government may manipulate the organizations for the government's own end.

It was a combination of Church and State that killed Christ, the Son of God.
"By our law he should die!" The church leaders cried. And by political manipulation the church crucified Christ through government powers.

In the past, for hundreds of years the persecuting power of church and state combined burned Christians at the stake, persecuted, and drove them into the wilderness.

The ONE PILLAR holding up our freedoms today is the separation of Church and State.
If this pillar is removed, as is currently in discussion, and is being pushed for heavily, dictatorship with a "Christian" facade will follow.

History will repeat. The love of power is corrupting. "The Church" dictating law through government will naturally end in persecution of all who follow their conscience over government dictatorship.

Thinking that they are doing good, they will persecute those following Christ.

It is important that people be able to express their beliefs but it is something else to force their beliefs on others via government powers. This should never be.

Please Stand for separation of Church and Government.

Thank you,

Adam Crabbe

U.S. citizen,
currently residing in Alberta, Canada

From: Sharon <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:10:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

I support separation of Church and State, as well as Religious Liberty for all Americans.

Thank youo
Sharon

photo

Create your own email signature

From: Brent Thomas <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty change
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:10:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members is the Religious Liberty Commission, please do not change the amendments to the US Constitution that have protected all of us from government control of churches or a church to be favored over others to influence the government. Freedom of religion is very important and so is freedom of conscience. Free choice was what many people came to this country for so please do not make changes that are not needed.
I am a concerned Christian citizen that doesn't want others of other religions have their choices taken away as well.
Brent Thomas
Sent from my iPhone

From: joenita lopez <[redacted]>
To: <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and State Separation
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:10:38 -0400
Importance: Normal

I respectfully request that as you read my letter you will consider maintaining the separation of the State and the church. It is fine to have Christians working in the state, but the state should have no Authority in the church. It will only bring persecution. Our religion is personal between ourselves and God as he would have it. God does not force anybody to worship Him. Therefore, we have no right to legislate religion for another man, each man's religion is maintained by his own conscience with God. The union of church and state is spoken of in the Bible in Revelation chapter 13 called the mark of the beast. It is forced religion. The reason it has to be forced is because the Holy Spirit is not with this movement and to maintain order they have to resort to force. God forbid. Jesus never told anybody to go out and force people to become followers. He told us to go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey all that I have told you. Matt. 28:20. The disciples clearly understood that this did not include any Force. Just read what Peter said...
"2Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." 1Pet. 5:2, 3. We are to be examples of the Lord Jesus Christ when he walked and ministered in this world. And as Jesus and the disciples were persecuted for the Everlasting gospel message, we too will be persecuted by the state when the church is United to the state and they use Force to unite all men into one form of religion, but the followers of Jesus will not fight back, but rather, in the love of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, give the Everlasting Covenant message to this Dying World and the warning to not receive the mark of the beast. If you want to understand this more clearly, get the book The Great controversy written by Ellen G White. It is an accurate account of the history of the church and the great Reformation from the oppressive Church in the Dark Ages when the church had the Authority of the State. Yes, Bible prophecy does say that our nation will adopt the characteristics of the Beast which forced people upon pain of Death To Worship according to their dictation, but this will bring in the judgments of God and this will be the final battle in this world. The decisions that men make regarding receiving the mark of the beast, or the Seal of God, is the final test of faithfulness to God and His Commandments. This test will determine if we will be saved in God's Kingdom, or if we will be lost eternally and destroyed in the Lake of Fire. So yes, my vote is that we do not Unite Church and State. God may allow this to happen, but it is not His will. Read the book of Revelation from chapter 12 to the end and you will see it's all about how to avoid receiving the mark of the beast. God bless all of you that read this commentary. Look forward to seeing you in the Kingdom when Jesus comes to receive his own. Thank you for your consideration.

From: Jeanne Newman <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Public comments
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:11:42 -0400
Importance: Normal

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **Jeanne Newman** <[redacted]>
Date: Sun, Jul 12, 2026 at 11:18 PM
Subject: Public comments
To:o<[redacted]>

Dear members of the Religous Liberty Commision,

I am writing to express my concern over the proposal to build bridges between church and state instead of maintaining separation between the two. I believe that we would be repeating the errors of the past should we push to move in that direction. Many of the first settlers that came to America fled Europe in part to escape religious oppression and persecution. The church in Europe used the government to enforce its decrees. Roger Williams, the founder of the colony of Rhode Island, denounced "inforced uniformity of religion" in which majority religious groups that controlled political power, punished, and in many cases persecuted dissenters.

One major attribute that makes America beautiful, is her alignment with the biblical principle that echoes the character of God, in that He does not force any man, rather, He allows one the freedom to choose. As a practicing christian, in my studying of the bible, it is clear that God does not use force or coercion with matters of conscience, nor does He force us to worship Him. Contrary to building bridges, He advised separation, noted three times in the bible, that we render what belongs to Caesar (government) to Caesar, and to God what is God's. We have seen throughout the pages of history that when church and state combine, it usually leads to persecution of minority groups, government corruption, and the loss of religious freedom, rather than the promotion of religious freedom.

Please reconsider all proposed measures that seek to build bridges between church and state, though the intention is to uplift and maintain religious freedom, history has repeatedly shown us, and should have taught us, that combining the two has resulted in the opposite of the intended. Remember the Salem witch trials of 1692 where the courts used church rules to convict people as being witches, and 19 innocent people were hung as a result. Remember The Act of Uniformity in England in 1662 where the King of England was the head of the Anglican Church and passed laws forcing everyone to use the official prayer books causing priests not following these church rules to lose their jobs, and people from different churches were fined and put into prison. Remember in AD 380 when the Roman Empire banned non-christian faiths, causing them to lose their civil rights. Remember the Spanish Inquisitions of 1478-1834 where those suspected to not follow official church teachings were hunted down, tortured, persecuted, and forced to flee their homes. Our founders created the Establishment Clause to help prevent such abuses of power, and the Free Exercise Clause so we are able to practice religion, or not to practice it at all, and not fear government punishment. No need to fall into the same pitfalls of past errors.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanne Newman

From: Jackie Morgan <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Preserving deportation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:12:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to submit my formal public comment expressing total opposition to the recommendations put forward in the June 2026 draft report. Rather than protecting true religious freedom, this document outlines an alarming blueprint to systematically break down the constitutional wall between church and state, while simultaneously narrowing the religious liberties of everyday Americans.
True religious freedom requires the government to remain strictly neutral. By attempting to elevate a singular, preferred religious viewpoint to a position of federal backing, this report actively undermines the First Amendment.
I urge the Commission to completely reject the following recommendations before a final report is issued:

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The recommendation to eliminate or weaken the Johnson Amendment directly threatens the independence of both our political system and our houses of worship. Allowing tax-exempt religious institutions to funnel money into political campaigns and endorse candidates turns sacred spaces into partisan tools. This narrows religious liberty by forcing churchgoers into politically divided congregations and inappropriately subsidizes political speech through tax-exempt dollars.

2. The Diversion of Public Funds to Religious Education
The report's push to expand federal voucher programs and direct public tax dollars to religious private schools is a direct violation of the Establishment Clause. Public funds must support public education, which serves all children equally. Forcing taxpayers to fund religious instruction—including schools whose doctrines they may fundamentally disagree with—is a severe infringement on individual freedom of conscience.

3. The Weaponization of "Conscience Protections" to Discriminate
The report seeks to radically expand "Free Exercise" rights for corporations, government-funded agencies, and healthcare providers at the direct expense of individual citizens.
In Healthcare:Expanding medical refusal clauses allows providers to deny essential care to patients based on religious dogma, compromising patient safety and autonomy.
In Social Services:Allowing taxpayer-funded adoption and foster care agencies to reject qualified families based on sexual orientation or religion is state-sanctioned discrimination.
In the Workplace:Broadening corporate religious rights allows private business owners to override federal labor protections, stripping employees of their reproductive healthcare benefits and civil rights.

4. The Exclusion of Minority Faiths and Non-Religious Americans
Religious liberty must be absolute and equal for all people. The draft report focuses almost exclusively on protecting majority Christian institutions while largely ignoring the documented rise of discrimination against Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist Americans, as well as the rapidly growing secular population. By favoring one religious tradition, the report inherently narrows the freedom of all others.

Conclusion
The recommendations in this report do not defend liberty; they attempt to create a dangerous union between church and state that historical precedent proves will lead to oppression, division, and the erosion of minority

rights. I demand that the Commission uphold the strict separation of church and state—the very framework that has allowed diverse religious expressions to thrive peacefully in America for over two centuries.

Sincerely,
Jackie Morgan

From: KenoAlleno <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:12:35 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would
weaken the separation of church and state — especially using government money to fund
religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.
When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics
comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of
to God — and that's bad for the church and the country alike. Separation isn't a secular idea;
people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here.Please keep
church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.
Sincerely,
Kenneth Allen
Boring, Oregon

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone

From: Patricia Dowd <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state!
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:14:17 -0400
Importance: Normal

I strongly oppose to the joining of church and state. The government should not have any part in religious matters nor should any church have part in government matters. The joining of these two puts our religious freedoms at risk. God is a God of choice and no man or government should have any power to control or impose on any religious beliefs or practices. Please protect our rights and freedom by keeping church and state completely seperate from one another.

Sincerly,
Patricia Dowd

From: Lynn Wong <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Establishment Clause – Lynn Wong
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:15:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a private citizen from Scottsdale, Arizona, who believes deeply that faith matters most when it is freely chosen. My own conviction, rooted in scripture, is that God's love cannot be legislated into a human heart. The invitation to choose whom you will serve only means something if the choosing is real, uncoerced by statute or state seal. A law cannot produce belief; it can only produce compliance, and compliance is not what any religion worth having actually asks for.

This is not a new insight I bring to you. Congress itself settled this question in 1829 and 1830, when Sabbatarian petitioners asked it to halt Sunday mail and enforce religious observance. The committee reports adopted by that Congress, written by men who had lived through the founding, declared plainly that it is not in the legitimate province of the legislature to determine what religion is true or what false, since our government is a civil and not a religious institution. That same Congress recognized that a representative is chosen to guard rights, not to restrict conscience, and warned that if a legislature defines even one point of religious duty, it has claimed the power to define them all, down to the ceremonies of worship and the support of the clergy. A commission proposing government-defined religious duties in 2026 must reckon with the fact that it is overturning not a modern court ruling but an official act of the founding generation's own Congress.

That founding settlement was not an accident of forgetfulness but a deliberate design, and it came from respect for religion, not hostility to it. The Presbytery of Hanover, the Baptists, and the Quakers were among the loudest voices demanding separation, because they had felt establishment pressing down on them from underneath. Madison, who drafted the Amendment, told the Virginia ratifying convention that there is not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion, and that its least interference would be a most flagrant usurpation. He and his contemporaries did not wait for full establishment before objecting; they saw all the consequences in the principle and denied the principle itself. Any commission that claims the founders for state-sponsored religion carries the burden of explaining away Madison's own words.

Nor is there a neutral religion for government to adopt. Protestants and Catholics cannot even agree on how to number or translate the Ten Commandments, and hundreds of bodies claim the Bible as their own. The moment the state chooses a version to display or teach, it has settled a live theological dispute and become, in effect, an ecclesiastical council — a role incompatible with a republican legislature that exists for political, not religious, purposes.

Finally, even legislation favoring one's own faith is self-defeating, for it is impossible to frame a law on religion that does not end up prohibiting someone's free exercise, perhaps eventually one's own. No one can safely lock today's creed into law without resigning the right to follow conscience wherever it may lead tomorrow.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Lynn Wong
Scottsdale, AZ

Sent from my iPhone

From: Lynn Aho <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment on Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:16:06 -0400
Importance: Normal

While the draft report provides instances in which religious liberties may have been infringed, it fails to supply convincing evidence for the claims that this is a serious and widespread problem, or that existing systems are inadequate to address conflicts as they arise.

More importantly, the action steps recommended in the report seem likely to make the situation worse rather than better. For example, in the area of K-12 education, wherever school choice systems extending beyond public schools have been implemented, the families that benefited were primarily those whose children were already attending a private school. Promoting hotlines for reporting violations seems far more likely to create a chilling effect on religious expression and a nigh-impossible situation for educators charged with supporting each students' religious expression while not allowing any of them to infringe on their classmates' religious liberties. That's hard to begin with, but with any student or parent who's offended encouraged to report on a hotline or portal instead of speaking to the teacher or administrator

From: Paula DiBenedetto <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:17:03 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: toRLC8.docx

See my letter

Salvatore DiBenedetto

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENTe- Separation of Church and Statee- Salvatore DiBenedetto

July 12, 2026

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was troubled to read that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." With respect, that is exactly backwards — and as a person of faith, I find the idea alarming. That wall wasn't built by secularists to keep religion down. It was built by believers to keep the church free. A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government money and political favors to march right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering to PillarofFreedom.org | [redacted] PII politicians instead of to God. History is clear about what happens when church and state jon hands, and it isn't good for either one. Please don't build that bridge keep them all. It protects the church far more than it constrains it.

Sincerely,

Salvatore DiBenedetto

Winnsboro, TX

From: Eloise Wiggins <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:18:22 -0400
Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhoneTo the RLC,I'm a citizen of these United States of America . I would like say we have enjoyed our freedom for these 250 year's,thee separation of church and state is vital to our Spiritual survival please stand up for what our Constitution says.....TY EWiggins of the state of New York

From: Abidan Baquero <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Abigail Castillo
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:19:03 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen who cares about both halves of the First Amendment's religion clauses, and I ask you to weigh an argument that many who favor state religious sponsorship would themselves recognize as Christian in origin. When Christ told his questioners to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's, he was not offering a vague piety but drawing a jurisdictional line. Civil government was given authority over duties owed between citizens; it was given no authority whatsoever over duties owed to God. As one nineteenth-century witness put it to a Senate committee weighing Sunday legislation, there is a limit to the lawmaking power, and that limit is the line Jesus Christ has drawn. The state may rightly ask whether an act injures a neighbor. It has no business asking whether an act is religious, irreligious, or heretical. Every recommendation that puts government behind a religious text, display, or lesson crosses that line — not because it is too devout for a secular state, but because it trespasses on ground reserved to God alone, on the authority of Christ's own words.

I also ask you to consider what kind of thing a right actually is. If religious liberty exists only because a majority currently favors it, then it is not a right at all but a permission, revocable whenever the majority's mood changes. Our constitutional tradition holds the opposite: that conscience answers first to the Creator, and that popular government exists precisely to protect the minority, since the majority can always look after itself at the polls. A Senate witness once answered the argument that most Americans wanted a religious measure by pointing out that the people, however numerous, have no right to invade another person's relationship with God. Congress itself once affirmed that the Constitution regards the conscience of the lone dissenter as sacred as that of the whole community. Popular support may justify a highway bill. It cannot justify a religious one, because religion was never a matter properly submitted to a vote.

Finally, I ask you to weigh what coercion does to faith itself. Religion is heart-work, and no statute can reach the heart. Forcing outward observance does not make Christians; it multiplies hypocrites. History bears this out on a grand scale: after nearly fifteen centuries of established Christianity, Madison could tally the fruits as pride and indolence in the clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, and in both, superstition and persecution. A faith propped up by government power trades the power of God for the power of the police, and the churches most eager for state help stand to lose the most by it. General Grant said it plainly: leave religion to the family altar, the church, and private instruction, and keep the state and church forever separate.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Abigail Castillo

From: Sherry Hess <[redacted]>
To: Presidential Commission On Religious Liberty US Department Of Justice<[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:20:49 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission members,

We thank you for asking the citizenry to speak up! My husband, Charles R HessJr. & myself, Sherry M Hess are adamantly opposed to any governmental intrusion into the affairs of religion, in our dear United States. Our precious founding was established by many wise & prudent men of faith, as our history has shown us. But they were absolutely convinced that our government should not favor one religion over another, nor should any religious doctrine be supported or implemented with favoritism over any other. The suggestion for the separation of church and state was the inspiration for our first and greatest amendment to our glorious Constitution. There are those religious men today who would invite favoritism to be shown to their churches, hospitals, and educational institutions, but this should not be allowed! It would behove our government to spend less of the hard earned money of patriots on special interests of these religious men.
We strongly advocate for Religious Liberty & the Free exercise of Religion without government support or stipulations.
Thank you for your careful considerations in these matters. May God bless America and sustain the
Freedom that we enjoy.
Sincerely, Charles & Sherry Hess
Sent from my iPhone

From: Donna Autin <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty, and my constitutional rights
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:21:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of freedoms Comments. Please implement them.

From: Margaret Wilson <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:22:32 -0400
Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them period. Thank you.

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone
Get Outlook for Android

From: Doug Plata <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Doug Plata
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:25:32 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing out of concern for some of the recommendations in your report that would (in my opinion) undermine religious liberty provisions found in the first amendment.

Whereas it is true that there have been anti-religious abuses against those of us of faith, especially in my state of California, the solution isn't to swing the pendulum too far in the other direction. I have had to defend my religious practices in my work setting and I have appreciated the role of government law in protecting the practice of my faith.

However, the Commission's report errs in that it misrepresents the history of the separation of church and state. That separation was not first established from an anti-religious sentiment. Quite the contrary. Roger Williams introduced the separation of church and state as a principle that would benefit all religions. Thomas Jefferson wrote the Danbury letter to Baptists where he explicitly agreed with their core premise, writing that religion is a matter "which lies solely between man & his God".

There is much that can be said on this topic. But to summarize, the two core religious liberty principles in the first amendment need to be maintained and the Johnson Amendment should not be repealed and religious activities should not receive government funding.

Thanks for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Doug Plata, MD, MPH
Redlands, CA

From: coulanges emmanuel <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment -Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:25:53 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: EC_Comment_to_Religious_Liberties_Commission.pdf

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Comment to the Religious Liberties Commission

Re: Preserving Religious Liberty Through Freedom of Conscience and the Constitutional Separation of Church and State

Members of the Religious Liberties Commission,

I respectfully submit this comment as a Christian, a healthcare professional, and an American citizen who believes that religious liberty is among the greatest blessings secured by our Constitution. My purpose is not to revisit the public health debates surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, but to explain why my own experience has convinced me that the constitutional separation of church and state remains an essential safeguard of the God-given rights of every American.

The First Amendment begins: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." These twin protections preserve both religious liberty and civil liberty by preventing governmental establishment of religion while protecting every citizen's freedom of conscience.

James Madison wrote in his 1785 "Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments": "The Religion ... of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man." He also warned that the same governmental authority capable of establishing one form of Christianity could establish another while excluding the rest.

My appreciation for these constitutional principles became deeply personal on September, 2021. After eighteen years of faithful service as a therapist at NYU Langone, my employment was terminated because I declined to comply with my employer's COVID-19 vaccination requirement. My decision was based upon my sincerely held convictions concerning my health and conscience. Whether others agree with my decision is not the central issue. The question is whether an American should lose the ability to earn a living because he or she declines a medical intervention based upon sincerely held religious or conscientious beliefs.

For nearly three years I was effectively prevented from working in the profession to which I had devoted much of my adult life. My family endured extraordinary financial hardship as savings, retirement accounts, and other financial resources were exhausted.

The consequences extended beyond my employment. During the same period, my children were unable to attend school in person for approximately two years because of COVID-19-related restrictions and mandates. Like many American families, we experienced profound disruption to our children's education, social development, and emotional well-being. These experiences reinforced my conviction that even during times

of national emergency, government policies must remain subject to constitutional limits and respect the fundamental liberties of families and individuals.

My purpose in sharing this experience is not to assign blame. Rather, it is to illustrate a broader constitutional principle: whenever government adopts a dominant ideology—whether political, scientific, economic, or even religious—and uses its authority to compel conformity without sufficient protection for freedom of conscience, individual liberty is placed at risk.

History repeatedly warns against concentrations of power over conscience. Christians have suffered persecution under hostile governments. The Jewish people endured the horrors of the Holocaust under Nazi Germany. Religious minorities around the world continue to suffer where governments favor one faith or suppress another. These examples differ greatly in their causes and should not be equated, but together they remind us that liberty is endangered whenever government exercises excessive authority over conscience.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1802 of building "a wall of separation between Church & State." Whether one prefers that phrase or another, the underlying constitutional principle remains vital: government should neither establish religion nor interfere with its free exercise.

My experience has also led me to respectfully oppose proposals to repeal the Johnson Amendment. While reasonable people disagree about its scope, I believe preserving appropriate limits on partisan political activity by tax-exempt churches helps protect the independence and moral credibility of religious institutions. Churches should remain free to preach biblical truth and address moral issues without becoming instruments of political parties or candidates. Keeping religious institutions institutionally independent from partisan politics strengthens both religious liberty and constitutional government.

As Christians, we should be among the strongest defenders of religious liberty for everyone—not because we seek privilege for ourselves, but because genuine faith cannot be compelled by civil authority. Government exists to protect rights and administer justice; the Church exists to proclaim the Gospel. When either assumes the proper role of the other, both religious liberty and civil liberty suffer.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Religious Liberties Commission to reaffirm the enduring constitutional principles embodied in the First Amendment: protection of religious liberty, freedom of conscience, the free exercise of religion, and governmental restraint from establishing or favoring religion. These principles have served our nation well for more than two centuries and remain among the strongest protections for the dignity and God-given rights of every American.

Respectfully submitted,

Emmanuel, Coulanges

New Market, AL

From: IS Tillman <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Iesha
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:26:13 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

When I read that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge.", I became alarmed. There are so many reasons why this proposition is completely the opposite of what the original purpose was for the seperation in the first place.

With all due respect, as a person of faith I believe that a bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government money and political favors to march right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering to politicians instead of to God. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it isn't good for either one. Please don't build that bridge. Keep the wall. It protects the church far more than it constrains it.

Sincerely,
Iesha
Tennessee

From: Verona Wood <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and State Comments. Special ATTN: DR CARSON
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:26:18 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Commission Members,

I am writing to express my deep concern after the recommendation given in the Oval Office to the President of the United States to in effect do away with the constitutional precedent to separate the powers of government from matters of religion. It is true our nation was founded by men who had deep faith and convictions that are based in Biblical principles. God in His providence, provided great wisdom and brave men to put pen to paper and create the structure for an amazing new kind of government. One that provided a place for persecuted Protestants to escape Papal persecution, as prophesied in Revelation 12:16. A place was provided for God's people to worship according to their conscience. This country has been so blessed and there is no greater gift than to have been born on this soil. I love this land, I love the freedom to go to church on the day that I'm convicted in my heart is the true Sabbath of the Lord Jesus Christ. I have the freedom to share my belief and invite others to join my church. I have the freedom to raise my children in this precious faith. All of this is because of the separation of church and state provided to us in the Constitution. Is that phrase in there? Not ver badem, but the principles of separation are clearly expressed all through the document. It is intellectual dishonesty to claim otherwise.

The current state of our country, the lawlessness, the degradation of our people, are the results of poor governance, by unconverted leaders. IF we are to be a Christian nation, it must start at the top! You, at the top must lead from a place of love and justice. You must lead as humble servants. You must be honorable and honest. This is not accomplished by enacting religious laws. You have to know this! Please look at history. We have an exceptional document, that is clearly embedded with safeguards to protect us from religious tyranny. This may not be what you believe will be the result of dismantling the wall of separation, but there is nothing new under the sun. This will lead us to religious persecution and ruin. Please leave the wall of separation, which is a wall of protection, in tact!

I have a special word for DR CARSON. Please, Dr Carson, remember the Great Controversy. Remember where this is tending. I know you know. Please be the one to bring Bible truth into this commission's deliberation. Please remember the agenda of the Dragon, the Beast and the False Prophet. Please do not sign your name to the document that unites this prophesied 3 fold union. I'm praying for you, as perhaps God has placed you in this position for such a time as this. Those on this commission who do not know what they are doing need to know. Please tell them! Warn them, before it's too late.

Thank you for the opportunity to plead for a reversal of your recommendation to dismantle the wall of separation. I pray for all of you to come to the decision to trust our country to God, and let Him work for the salvation of souls a little while longer.

Sincerely,

Verona Wood

From: Merrie Jensen <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state.
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:26:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am surprised that there are leaders in our country who would try to have us believe that the constitution did not put forth the idea of separation of church and state. Those leaders have obviously not done their homework in being knowledgeable, or, they have some dark intentions in mind, such as forcing individuals to believe and worship as they feel it should be done. I would like to applaud the letter sent by Alexander Bowen in defense of separation of church and state and could not agree with him more. Please consider keeping our country free from becoming a persecuting power by keeping in tact the separation of church and state. Thank you.

From: Angela Arocho <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:27:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Esteemed Religious Liberty Commission:

America was founded on religious freedom, this is one of the many reasons why our nation is so great and has been so successful. God has had His hand in the forming of America, but also, God isn't forceful He gives us free will. Amen for that!

My concern is America is trying to take those rights away. Rights that so many brave men died for. Let's not forget our history. Jesus also gave Himself for us, but never forces His will upon us. I hope you understand my concern. I love Jesus & this country, but believe in freedom of how we worship and keeping the day that God sanctified Holy. I wouldn't want to go against my conscience, as I'm sure most wouldn't.

Thank you for your time,

Angela Arocho

From: seventhday is sabbath <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTo- Separation of Church and State – [Brenda D]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:27:18 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I believe that the separation of church and state is something that needs to stay in place and continue like it has since the founding of our country, God has blessed us as a country by keeping this wall in place giving people the freedom to worship to the dictates of their own conscious, and it is evident that it has been working, we see this by what we have accomplished in our history of 250 years and by making this country a place where people want to come because of our freedoms.

Politics and religion do not mix, we can clearly see in the Bible that Jesus never mixed himself with politicians and when church and state came together at His trial and crucifixion there was nothing good that became of it, Jesus gives us freewill to choose how to worship or not to worship at all, if this bridge is allowed to replace what is currently in place (A wall giving us separation of church and state) there will be a tendency for the state to make choices for the people based on their political beliefs.

Please, I respectfully ask that the wall be kept in place and that NO bridge be built.. Thank you

Brenda Dobson
Sandy OR

From: Denise Wilson <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:29:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

I agree with the Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them. Thank you.

Sent from my iPhone

From: Larry Wattse[redacted]
To: "RLC (OASG)" [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:30:35 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Inalienable_and_Civil_Rights.docx

PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – [Larry D. Watts]

Inalienable and Civil Rights

Is it true that "you cannot change the direction of the ship of state; you can only change the compass," as Richard Nixon is credited with saying? Perhaps it was true for him, but there have been individuals who changed the course of nations. We cast their busts in brass, carve their faces into stone, and print them on our currency.

These were men and women who had discernment. They understood that there are two kinds of limits: some are necessary, and others are agreed upon. The necessary limits are inalienable. The agreed-upon limits are civil. How these two are understood defines the proper relationship between church and state. The incorrect direction this legislation is taking may appear to be merely chasing its own tail, but it will ultimately go for the jugular.

"You cannot solve a problem with the same kind of thinking that created it," Albert Einstein said. He was right. This approach will create the very thing it is purportedly trying to avoid because, by its nature, it seeks to prevent the loss of our freedoms by suppressing those freedoms—trading liberty for security. These are mafia methods and terrorist MOs. In order for the government to work in this way, it must first turn citizens into subjects, and then subjects into slaves.

1. Blurring the line between inalienable and civil rights through legislation further obscures that distinction. Inalienable rights are not negotiable. While some believe these are matters of preference, the laws of nature—such as physics and procreation—are established facts and remain: gravity attracts, and children come into the world through specific circumstances. No one has yet been able to manipulate inalienable rights. The genius of the Declaration of Independence was to recognize that fact, and the Constitution, along with the Federalist Papers, set out to define civil rights, responsibilities, and privileges. This distinction must be made part of the solution.
2. When the governed do not exercise their right of self-determination, they deserve what they get. Encouragement is the second necessity. But this cannot be done by force, or we return to where we came from. The solution is not merely more legislation of this kind, but passing the Save America Act, and enforcing the laws already on the books.
3. Then educate. Teach in civics classes and history classes that citizens must properly exercise their civil rights if they want to remain citizens and not become subjects, and then slaves. This is what accurate history tells us we need to teach.
4. Separation of church and state is inextricably linked to understanding the difference between inalienable and civil rights. When courts rule against this distinction, they violate the Constitution—and often do so in the name of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence—because they intentionally blur the line between the two kinds of rights.
5. Yes, there should be a separation between church and state. Historically, the joining of the two has always resulted in the persecution of the minority.

6. The Electoral College, the two chambers of Congress, and the separation of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government make the United States a republic, not a democracy. Let Republicans prevail.
7. Not by passing more laws, but by educating people, properly understanding the issues, encouraging citizens to vote, and securing the counting of their votes. This can be done by passing the Save America Act.
8. Congress should not be allowed to pass two different kinds of laws: one for themselves and another for the rest of us.
9. Return ethics to how we run the government so citizens can know that their interests, not merely the interests of politicians, are being represented on the Hill.
10. Establish term limits for elected office, with the exception of the judicial bench.

From: Paula DiBenedetto <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:31:05 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: TO_RLC_letter.docx

Please see my letter attached.

Paula DiBenedetto

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENTe- Separation of Church and State –Paula DiBenedetto

July 12, 2026

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was troubled to read that the Commission wants

to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." With respect, that is exactly backwards — and as a person of faith, I find the idea alarming. That wall wasn't built by secularists to keep religion down. It was built by believers to keep the church free. A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government money and political favors to march right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering to PillarofFreedom.org | [redacted] PII politicians instead of to God. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it isn't good for either one. Please don't build that bridge keep them all. It protects the church far more than it constrains it.

Sincerely,

Paula DiBenedetto

Winnsboro, TX

From: Caleb <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State – Caleb Ramos
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:31:32 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Vice Chair Dr Carson and Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was troubled to read that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge."

With all due respect, that is exactly backward to what our founding fathers intended for this nation and as a Christian who loves his country dearly, I find the idea extremely alarming! That wall was not built by secularists to subjugate religion. It was built by faithful, Bible believing Protestant Christians to keep the church free from tyranny! A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it enslaves it by opens the door for government money and political corruption to become entangled with religion, until churches are answering to politicians instead of to Almighty God.

History is very clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it isn't good for either one. When either dominates the other, both are distorted and eventually destroyed.

Please do not pursue building that bridge. Keep the wall. It protects the church far more than it constrains it.

If these recommendations go through, they will lead to the destruction of the very liberties that the commission claims to be protecting.

Sincerely,
Caleb Ramos
Idaho

From: Susan Goodwin <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Opposition to Bridging Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:36:42 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:,

Please do not bridge the church and state separation. Do not allow one entity to dominate the other. Uphold the First Amendment.

"The Religious Liberty Commission should ensure that every recommendation strengthens both the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause together. These clauses are complementary protections of liberty of conscience.

The constitutional measure of religious liberty is not whether the majority religion enjoys greater influence, but whether the smallest and least popular religious minority retains equal protection under the law.

America's republican form of government depends upon limiting governmental authority over conscience, because rights are secured by government—not created by it. The success of this Commission should therefore be measured by whether its recommendations preserve liberty for all citizens, regardless of faith."

Respectfully,

Susan

From: R Gage <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:37:03 -0400
Importance: Normal

It is essential that we keep our founding fathers' ideal of separation of Church and State a reality. It is as American as the flag. The government must not cater to religious beliefs or holidays but maintain complete separation.
Thank you.

From: Karissa <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT -RE: RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:38:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

Thank you for the opportunity to give feedback on the recommendations brought by the Religious Liberty Committee submitted to the president on June 26, 2026. I would like to voice my opposition to recommendations 1 and 9 of the committee. I believe them to be in contradiction of the first amendment to the constitution. The United States of America was founded on principles of religious and personal liberty and I believe these freedoms have much to do with our country's success. These liberties are only possible when there is a separation of church and state, when the government does not show favor to one religion over another, or prohibit one religion and allow another. The founding fathers understood this well and were careful to safe-guard religious and personal freedoms (freedom of speech, freedom of the press) by making the separation of church and state clear in the first amendment to the constitution. By studying other writings/letters of our first presidents, their views and wisdom on this topic are confirmed and made clearer. I would respectfully ask the Department of Justice to further study our founding fathers' views on this subject and to look into the history of governments that united church and state, both in Europe and in the American colonies. I believe that you will find religious persecution, censorship, and suppression of the people's liberties.

Sincerely,
Karissa Sharley

From: Patricia Perry <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment, Religious Liberty, Patricia
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:40:41 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am opposed to Christian Nationalism. We must uphold the separation of church and state. The government should not control the churches and the churches should not control the government on any level.

From: "Jerry/Darlene Nash" <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Gerald and Darlene Nash
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:41:51 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

We personally are thankful for and value the freedoms we have in the United States of America, among them the freedom of religion, and we believe that the separation of church and state is responsible for that freedom. Therefore, religious non-profit funding should come from those who support that particular ministry or organization and not from government funds.

Other nations who have united church and state have experienced intolerance of non state approved religions and pressure on the government by the church for financial and legislative support, so neither is better for the relationship.

Please do not recommend weakening the separation of church and state.

Sincerely,
Gerald and Darlene Nash
Hendersonville, NC

From: Joseph C <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Please support religious freedom
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:42:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

Please support religious freedom for all faiths, In USA.

From: Linnea Buchheim <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment – Religious Liberty Commission Report – Linnea Buchheim
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:42:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I agree in full with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.

Linnea Buchheim

From: Peggy Skiles <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:43:21 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern!
I agree with one of our founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson! He says that, "believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church & State."

The government has no authority to dictate my beliefs or dictate how I worship. Furthermore, the government lacks authority over religion. This is a critically important right, and I oppose any attempt to undermine it.

Peggy Skiles

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone

From: ldbyeo [redacted]
To: "RLC (OASG)" [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:43:42 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to submit my formal public comment expressing total opposition to the recommendations put forward in the June 2026 draft report. Rather than protecting true religious freedom, this document outlines an alarming blueprint to systematically break down the constitutional wall between church and state, while simultaneously narrowing the religious liberties of everyday Americans.
True religious freedom requires the government to remain strictly neutral. By attempting to elevate a singular, preferred religious viewpoint to a position of federal backing, this report actively undermines the First Amendment.
I urge the Commission to completely reject the following recommendations before a final report is issued:

1. The Subversion of the Johnson Amendment
The recommendation to eliminate or weaken the Johnson Amendment directly threatens the independence of both our political system and our houses of worship. Allowing tax-exempt religious institutions to funnel money into political campaigns and endorse candidates turns sacred spaces into partisan tools. This narrows religious liberty by forcing churchgoers into politically divided congregations and inappropriately subsidizes political speech through tax-exempt dollars.

2. The Diversion of Public Funds to Religious Education
The report's push to expand federal voucher programs and direct public tax dollars to religious private schools is a direct violation of the Establishment Clause. Public funds must support public education, which serves all children equally. Forcing taxpayers to fund religious instruction—including schools whose doctrines they may fundamentally disagree with—is a severe infringement on individual freedom of conscience.

3. The Weaponization of "Conscience Protections" to Discriminate
The report seeks to radically expand "Free Exercise" rights for corporations, government-funded agencies, and healthcare providers at the direct expense of individual citizens.
In Healthcare:Expanding medical refusal clauses allows providers to deny essential care to patients based on religious dogma, compromising patient safety and autonomy.
In Social Services:Allowing taxpayer-funded adoption and foster care agencies to reject qualified families based on sexual orientation or religion is state-sanctioned discrimination.
In the Workplace:Broadening corporate religious rights allows private business owners to override federal labor protections, stripping employees of their reproductive healthcare benefits and civil rights.

4. The Exclusion of Minority Faiths and Non-Religious Americans
Religious liberty must be absolute and equal for all people. The draft report focuses almost exclusively on protecting majority Christian institutions while largely ignoring the documented rise of discrimination against Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist Americans, as well as the rapidly growing secular population. By favoring one religious tradition, the report inherently narrows the freedom of all others.

Conclusion
The recommendations in this report do not defend liberty; they attempt to create a dangerous union between church and state that historical precedent proves will lead to oppression, division, and the erosion of minority rights. I demand that the Commission uphold the strict separation of church and state—the very framework that

has allowed diverse religious expressions to thrive peacefully in America for over two centuries.

Sincerely,
Linda Bye

From: Counselor Morgan <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty as I see it.
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:47:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

True religious liberty must protect everyone's freedom of choice, not favor one group over another. If the Commission favors one religious group, it stops being religious liberty and becomes favoritism.

No one should be forced into any belief or practice, nor should any group be allowed to impose their views on others. This principle applies equally to all faiths, including those we may personally disagree with. As someone who believes God gives every person freedom of choice, I ask that the Commission ensure its work protects this freedom for all Americans without exception.

The same balance should apply to other deeply held beliefs. People should be free to live according to their conscience, but not empowered to compel others to affirm or participate in those choices against their will.

Thank you for your service. I hope your work strengthens religious liberty for every citizen.

Sincerely,

Warmly,

Winston Morgan
A School Counselor

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From: Franklin Morris 2 <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:49:07 -0400
Importance: Normal

Hello. My name is Franklin Morris II, and I'm thankful and blessed to live in the US where I can freely worship God according to the dictates of my conscience.

I'm thankful for the first amendment if the Constitution, which says, "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."

I'm thankful there is intentional wording in the Constitution separating church and state. Roger Williams had a "radical" idea (which isn't radical to me) that people should be able to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience. His views were so "radical" that fled a colony during the winter so he wouldn't be out in prison. He later founded Rhode Island, and the religious liberty principles of that colony helped shape the US.

Combining church and state is dangerous, and can lead to persecution. People fled other countries to come to the US, which isn't ruled by a king or a pope, and I hope it stays that way.

--Franklin

From: Martin Kim <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:49:14 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to submit my formal public comment expressing total opposition to the recommendations put forward in the June 2026 draft report. Rather than protecting true religious freedom, this document outlines an alarming blueprint to systematically break down the constitutional wall between church and state, while simultaneously narrowing the religious liberties of everyday Americans.
True religious freedom requires the government to remain strictly neutral. By attempting to elevate a singular, preferred religious viewpoint to a position of federal backing, this report actively undermines the First Amendment.
I urge the Commission to completely reject the following recommendations before a final report is issued:

1. The Subversion of the Johnson Amendment
The recommendation to eliminate or weaken the Johnson Amendment directly threatens the independence of both our political system and our houses of worship. Allowing tax-exempt religious institutions to funnel money into political campaigns and endorse candidates turns sacred spaces into partisan tools. This narrows religious liberty by forcing churchgoers into politically divided congregations and inappropriately subsidizes political speech through tax-exempt dollars.

2. The Diversion of Public Funds to Religious Education
The report's push to expand federal voucher programs and direct public tax dollars to religious private schools is a direct violation of the Establishment Clause. Public funds must support public education, which serves all children equally. Forcing taxpayers to fund religious instruction—including schools whose doctrines they may fundamentally disagree with—is a severe infringement on individual freedom of conscience.

3. The Weaponization of "Conscience Protections" to Discriminate
The report seeks to radically expand "Free Exercise" rights for corporations, government-funded agencies, and healthcare providers at the direct expense of individual citizens.
In Healthcare:Expanding medical refusal clauses allows providers to deny essential care to patients based on religious dogma, compromising patient safety and autonomy.
In Social Services:Allowing taxpayer-funded adoption and foster care agencies to reject qualified families based on sexual orientation or religion is state-sanctioned discrimination.
In the Workplace:Broadening corporate religious rights allows private business owners to override federal labor protections, stripping employees of their reproductive healthcare benefits and civil rights.

4. The Exclusion of Minority Faiths and Non-Religious Americans
Religious liberty must be absolute and equal for all people. The draft report focuses almost exclusively on protecting majority Christian institutions while largely ignoring the documented rise of discrimination against Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist Americans, as well as the rapidly growing secular population. By favoring one religious tradition, the report inherently narrows the freedom of all others.

Conclusion
The recommendations in this report do not defend liberty; they attempt to create a dangerous union between church and state that historical precedent proves will lead to oppression, division, and the erosion of minority rights. I demand that the Commission uphold the strict separation of church and state—the very framework

that has allowed diverse religious expressions to thrive peacefully in America for over two centuries.

Sincerely,
Martin

From: Handel Smith <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTo- Establishment Clause – Handel G. Smith
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:50:13 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for receiving comments from the public on the draft report. Liberty of conscience is one of those inalienable rights promised in the United States Constitution. Let's uphold that.

Forcing state run religion is what Socialism and Communism attempt to do, it's un-American.

Without the separation between Church and State, like Socialism, Churches would begin to worship the State, and not Christ. God would judge us.

We're a nation built on Christian values, it's not necessary to force Christianity, I wouldn't force anyone to worship on the 7th day any more than I'd want to be forced to worship on the 1st. We must oppose both laws in good conscience.

I write to ask the Commission to uphold the separation of church and state — the arrangement that has kept faith in America both free and strong. My reasons are these:

The founding generation's own Congress already examined this question. The reports of Richard M. Johnson's committees, adopted in 1829 and 1830, declared: "It is not in the legitimate province of the legislature to determine what religion is true or what false. Our government is a civil and not a religious institution." I ask the Commission to align its report with that precedent.

Separation was the founders' deliberate design, urged on them by the churches themselves. Madison told the Virginia ratifying convention: "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 ask the Commission to honor that design, not explain it away.

The two religion clauses are one shield. As Jones warned the Senate in 1888, "It is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion." A law favoring religion today is a precedent controlling it tomorrow, and the machinery now proposed comes with no guarantee about who will operate it next.

Christ himself divided human duty into two jurisdictions: what we owe our neighbors belongs to civil law; what we owe God lies beyond it. As A. T. Jones told the United States Senate in 1888, "civil government is civil, and has nothing to do in the matter of legislation, with religious observances in any way." I urge the Commission to keep every recommendation on the civil side of that line.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Handel G. Smith
Loveland, CO

From: "Tawanna (Britton) Wiggins" <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to the Religious Liberty Commission Recommendations
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:50:53 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 12, 2026

Via Electronic Mail to RLC @usdoj.gov

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
US Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Room 5706
Washington DC 20530

Dear Chair Dan Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Ben Carson and and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

The United States of America has been blessed above any nation upon which the sun has shone, in great part due to her commitment to liberty of consciousness regarding religion. It is deeply troubling to see an encroachment to this commitment recommended by opening the door to a church state union.

As we see throughout world history, the joining of church and state authorities fosters a violation of liberty of conscience— a sacred obligation between one's Creator and his or herself— and persecution ensues. A church that has God Almighty on her side, does not require or need the arm of the state to enforce her edicts or give her financial support. The state can be blessed by the strong positive influence of the church on society as a whole, being allowed the free exercise of its worship and belief as stated in the Constitution without the violation of another's conscience or right to life.

As many on this committee espouse Christian values, I would share words from Holy Writ. It is written, in John 18:36, "Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered…". Also in Matthew 22:21, Mark 12:17 and Luke 20:25, a distinct difference was made between what belongs to Caesar and to God. This separation made clear again, by the words of Christ Himself.

Let all in government be advised of the cautionary conclusions of the union of church and state in centuries past by the bloodshed of martyrs and even Jesus Christ Himself. Even currently, other nations without religious freedom display the horrors of persecution of those with differing beliefs. Shall America follow into those footsteps by breaching the Constitution favoring one religion above another? Can God not care for, provide and protect His believers? Do they not now, have freedoms to preach and teach in the public square? He will protect and provide for them, nothing can separate them from His love.

The book of Revelation depicts a time when all will be forced to worship a particular way (Revelation 13:15), clearly a union of some type of religious view and state power—but this is not God's way. God does not force the conscience, He desires love, which cannot be forced or legislated (1 Corinthians 13). The penalty will be, one cannot buy or sell (Revelation 13:17) and eventually death (Revelation

13:15). But all these actions were not warranted by God (Revelation 12:17, Revelation 15:2). Those who believe scripture will recall a time when the disciples of Christ wanted to call fire down from heaven upon those that did not show honor to Christ, he rebuked them and told them , “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of” Luke 9:55. This was not a nod to secularism. It was God showing worship can never be forced.

Let us not chip away at the religious freedoms of all, in the name of liberty to favor one belief over another. It will eventually, imperil the peaceful shores of this great nation. Woe to the nation, that like Babylon of old, tried to force all to bow down to an image, in violation of the conscience of those who disagreed (Daniel chapter 3). Babylon is fallen (Revelation 14:8). The pilgrims found refuge from religious persecution in this nation, let us not turn back to those atrocities. Keep the distinction of powers between religion and the state separate.

May God bless America to remain free and just. Follow the wisdom of Roger Williams, James Madison and other American founders, uphold the principles of the US Constitution, keep the Johnson Amendment. Those of religious faith, and those of none at all, have the right, in this nation, to seek truth for themselves without bias from a state sponsored religion. The very nature of the nations of the world that do the opposite is antithetical to the Judeo-Christian values of America.

Respectfully,

Tawanna Wiggins
Inglewood, California

From: Amy Wilson <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Testimony reg: Draft Report/Sep of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:55:44 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: ReligiousFreedom.docx

Please read attached letter.

Regards, Amy Wilson

Date: July 11, 2026

From: Amy Wilson

To: Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

To Whom it May Concern:

I am sending this letter, as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, to respectfully tell you that I disagree with the recent conclusion of the religious liberty commission associated with the administration of President Trump, which was held on April 13, and their conclusion that there is no true or absolute separation of church and state.

I cannot agree with this conclusion, and my position is based on the Holy Scriptures, the Constitution of the United States of America, and the consistent destructive course of history when state and religious power have collided. Together, these three things conclude that the preservation of liberty of conscience demands the separation of the state, governed by man, and the church, which is governed by the authority of God. I believe this is quite distinct in Matthew 22:21, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God’s”. Two different governments are clearly defined here. The civil government is responsible for maintaining civil order and relations, collecting taxes, etc. God alone holds the authority over our liberty of conscience and our worship.

Because our conscience belongs only to God, no civil government has the right to force or compel anyone to believe, to worship, or to regulate religious practice. I believe that true faith can’t exist without true freedom because, among other things, faith is voluntary. For centuries in Europe, an alliance between church and state existed; this led to the suppression of conscience and widespread persecution. The French Revolution can even be attributed to the loss of religious liberty.

When the Pilgrims came to America, they were looking for freedom from state-controlled religion. This is what laid the groundwork for the idea that faith must be free. As mentioned in the Declaration of Independence, “All are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among which is liberty.” Thus, a constitutional commitment that the government must not establish a religion or interfere with the free exercise thereof.

To make sure that my message is not misunderstood in any way, I affirm the following:

1. I support Religious Liberty.

   As James Madison outlines in his 1785 essay “Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments”, “It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage and such only as he believes to be acceptable to him.” This is a principle that is confirmed in Romans 14:12: “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God”. Liberty of conscience must remain separate from the state. Joshua 24:15 states, “Choose you this day whom you will serve.” The gospel must be freely chosen, never compelled.

2. I support the Free Exercise of Faith

William Penn, an English Quaker and the founder of Pennsylvania, spent much of his life fighting for religious freedom. While imprisoned in the Tower of London around 1670, he wrote in a letter to Lord Arlington, “Force may make hypocrites, but it can never make converts”. This is another principle that is confirmed by the Holy Scriptures in Zechariah 4:6: “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord.” True faith is a product of the work of the Spirit, not by any man or civil power. God does not wish for coerced obedience, which is affirmed by 2 Corinthians 9:7, “God loveth a cheerful giver.”

3. I support the Separation of Church and State

James Madison wrote in Detached Memoranda, circa 1817, “Strongly guarded as is the separation between Religion and 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.” Thomas Jefferson, in the letter the Danbury Baptists in 1802, coined the phrase “wall of separation” between Church and State. John F. Kennedy agreed with the sentiment when he stated, “I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute,’ thus recognizing that liberty of conscience can only be guaranteed when the government stays free from religious control, and religion remains free from the government interfering with it. As mentioned above, this is affirmed in Matthew 22:21, “Render therefore unto Ceaser that which is Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.

4. I absolutely oppose ANY union between Church and State

The persecution of the Waldenses during the Dark Ages is one example of what happens when church and state unite. But perhaps the greatest example of all would be the crucifixion of Christ. The religious leaders of the time lacked the authority and legal power to execute Jesus, and so they brought Him before the Roman governor to get their civil sentence (See John 18:28-31). Though Pontius Pilate found no fault in Him, he still yielded to the religious authority and condemned Jesus to death. This terrible union showed the result was not righteousness, but an actual violation of any true justice.

At this time, I would also like to clarify that although some Seventh Day Adventists serve in government or advisory roles, they do not represent the beliefs of all, or any, faithful Adventists. Any position stating otherwise does not reflect me, my beliefs, nor the historic beliefs of my church. Psalm 118:8 states, “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.” Guided by this and many other principles found in Scripture, I affirm my commitment to true Freedom and Liberty of Conscience. Therefore, I must strongly oppose any joining of Church and State. I ask your office to uphold the rightful distinction between civil authority and the authority of God.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Sincerely,

Amy Wilson

Soldotna, AK

From: Norma Gillett <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:58:24 -0400
Importance: Normal

The freedom to worship as one wishes is one of the practices in this country that makes America unique. A unity of church and state would erode that freedom. The question is, whose interest would this serve? Certainly not the citizen who knows and values the freedom to worship based on the dictates of conscience. This act should be revisited.

From: Freedom Fighter <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Chapters 9/10 - Dian Dossias
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:58:25 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: RLC_Public_Comment_7.12.26.pdf; Brief_for_Secretary_McMahon.pdf

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Dear Members of the Commission,

Please find attached our public comment on the draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, addressing a specific gap in Chapters 9 and 10: religious and medical exemptions honored by a student's own school that are routinely overridden by private third-party administrators (such as ACEMAPP and DISA Healthcare) managing clinical placement on behalf of hospitals and training sites.

In brief, our comment:

- Documents the mechanism through current, cited policies at Wayne State University, the University of San Francisco, and Mount Saint Mary College
- Points to Indiana House Enrolled Act 1160 (2026) as a model the Commission's recommendations should be extended to match nationally
- Proposes specific report language and enforcement mechanisms
- Encloses related correspondence sent to Secretary of Education Linda McMahon (cc. Secretary Kennedy) on this same issue in March 2025

Two files are attached: our full comment letter, and the referenced March 2025 correspondence to Secretary McMahon.

Thank you for your consideration.

Dian Dossias
Founder, Stop College Mandates
Tele:[redacted]

July 12, 2026

Religious Liberty Commission
U.S. Department of Justice
Submitted via email to: [redacted]

Re: Public Comment on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission — Extending Chapter 9 and Chapter 10's Religious Exemption Protections to Third-Party Clinical Compliance Administrators

Submitted by: Dian Dossias, Stop College Mandates

Dear Members of the Commission:

Stop College Mandates respectfully submits this comment in strong support of the Commission's draft report, and in particular Chapter 10's recognition that vaccine mandates have imposed serious, coercive burdens on students of faith, and Chapter 9's recommendations to restore and strengthen healthcare conscience protections. We write to identify a specific enforcement gap in both chapters, one the Commission's own hearing record already touches on but does not yet name: religious and medical exemptions that a student's own school honors are routinely overridden by private third-party administrators managing clinical placement on behalf of hospitals and other training sites.

In the section on Parental Rights in Education, the draft report notes that parents "testified that their students seeking religious exemptions to vaccines were not receiving the same treatment that similarly situated students with medical exemptions—or no medical records at all—received." We write to show the Commission that this is not an isolated grievance but a structural problem with an identifiable mechanism, and to point the Commission to a state that has already legislated a workable fix.

I. The Mechanism: Third-Party Clinical Compliance Administrators

Students in nursing, allied health, and other clinical training programs cannot complete their degrees, and in many cases cannot sit for licensure, without supervised clinical rotations at hospitals and partner facilities. Because these facilities do not manage credentialing separately for every affiliated school, most now route immunization records, background checks, and exemption requests through third-party compliance administrators under contract with the clinical site

itself — not the school. ACEMAPP and DISA Healthcare are two of the largest platforms currently used for this purpose, and a number of smaller regional and hospital-system-specific platforms perform the same function elsewhere.

This produces a gap that policy aimed only at the school does not reach. A student's home institution may have a written policy honoring religious or medical exemptions, consistent with state law. But the clinical site — acting through its third-party administrator — is a separate party to an affiliation agreement between the school and the facility, and these administrators routinely state that exemption approval is at the sole discretion of the clinical partner, with no appeal process, no written-explanation requirement, and no consistency from site to site. A student can be fully compliant with their own school's policy and still be dismissed from the program because a clinical site's third-party administrator, once removed from the school, declined the same exemption.

Schools are frequently reluctant to challenge these downstream requirements themselves, because clinical placements are scarce and are typically preserved through affiliation agreements the school cannot afford to jeopardize. This is not a historical problem from the 2021–2023 mandate era; it is current, and institutions describe the mechanism in their own written policies.

Wayne State University's own Radiation Therapy Technology program states plainly that "[n]o exemptions from the vaccination requirements are allowed," specifying that this includes medical and religious exemptions alike (cphs.wayne.edu). Its College of Nursing takes a narrower but still restrictive approach: religious exemptions are accepted only for COVID-19 and influenza, are not permitted at all for MMR, hepatitis B, varicella, or Tdap, and warns that a clinical site may reject a declination the university has already approved — in which case the student, not the university, is responsible for securing an alternative placement (nursing.wayne.edu). The University of San Francisco's School of Nursing and Health Professions is more direct still: its student handbook states that its clinical partners "are not offering medical exemptions to students," and warns that a student who cannot meet those requirements may have degree completion slowed or halted entirely (myusf.usfca.edu). Mount Saint Mary College shows how closely the requirement now tracks the clinical relationship rather than general public health policy: the college no longer requires COVID-19 vaccination campus-wide, but continues to require it, plus at least one booster, specifically for students in clinical programs such as Nursing (msmc.edu).

II. Indiana Has Already Closed This Gap: House Enrolled Act 1160 (2026)

On March 12, 2026, Governor Mike Braun signed Indiana House Enrolled Act 1160 into law as Public Law 150-2026. The Act provides that a student enrolled in a health profession education program may not be required to receive an immunization as a condition of participating in, or obtaining, the clinical training or clinical experience required by the program, where the student or the student's parent objects on religious grounds.

This is precisely the gap this comment asks the Commission to close nationally. Indiana's legislature recognized that a religious exemption is meaningless if it protects enrollment but not the clinical placement a health-profession degree actually requires, and it wrote the clinical-placement stage directly into the statute rather than leaving it to whichever third-party administrator a given clinical site happens to use. To our knowledge, Indiana is currently the only state to have extended statutory protection specifically to the clinical-placement stage of health-profession education in this way.

III. Extend the Commission's Recommendations to Match Indiana's Model

Chapter 10 already recommends federal action to secure students' religious exemptions from vaccination requirements, and Chapter 9 already recommends expanding Church Amendments coverage and restoring the HHS Conscience and Religious Freedom Division. We are not asking the Commission to create a new or competing recommendation. We ask that the final report point to Indiana's new law as a workable model and clarify that the federal action it already recommends should reach the entity actually making the exemption decision in clinical settings, which today is frequently a third-party administrator rather than the school or the hospital's own human resources office.

We respectfully recommend that the final report include language substantially similar to the following, modeled on Indiana's approach but extended to the entity actually administering the requirement:

Where a student's religious or medical exemption from a vaccination requirement has been recognized by their institution of enrollment, a third-party clinical compliance or credentialing administrator acting on behalf of a required clinical placement site may not override that exemption absent specific, individualized,

and documented evidence — beyond the existence of the religious objection itself — that no reasonable accommodation is available. Any such denial should be provided to the student in writing, with the specific grounds stated, within a reasonable period.

This does not ask clinical sites to abandon legitimate, individualized safety determinations. It asks that those determinations be made on the same documented, non-pretextual basis Indiana has already required by statute, and that this report already recommends for schools and employers, rather than through an unreviewable private intermediary.

IV. A Structural Risk the Commission Should Investigate: Unequal Treatment Between Students and Employees

Because students and employees at the same clinical facility typically request exemptions through different channels — students through their school's third-party administrator, employees through the facility's own human resources office — there is little public transparency into whether the two are held to consistent standards. We believe this warrants direct Commission inquiry: are religious and medical exemptions granted to hospital and clinic employees at the same rate, and under the same criteria, as exemptions requested by students rotating through the same units?

If the answer is no, that discrepancy would be difficult to justify on clinical or safety grounds alone, since the infection risk posed by an unvaccinated student and an unvaccinated employee performing comparable patient-facing duties is not meaningfully different. A pattern of that kind would suggest some administrators are applying exemption policy as a matter of institutional convenience or liability management rather than documented clinical necessity — precisely the kind of pretextual denial the Commission's own recommendations on Church Amendments enforcement are meant to reach in the employment context, and should reach here as well. We would welcome the opportunity to submit specific case documentation as it becomes available, and encourage the Commission to request exemption-approval data broken out by student status directly from third-party administrators and clinical sites.

V. Companion Correspondence

For the Commission's context, on March 20, 2025, our coalition wrote to Secretary of Education Linda McMahon, with a copy to Secretary of Health and

Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr., urging the Department to explicitly name medical, nursing, and other allied-health training programs in its guidance implementing Executive Order 14214, “Keeping Education Accessible and Ending COVID-19 Vaccine Mandates in Schools” (Feb. 15, 2025).

That letter independently documented the same dynamic described in Section I above: it noted that clinical training sites continue to impose their own vaccination requirements as a condition of the affiliation agreements schools depend on, arrangements our letter described as often preserved out of institutional necessity rather than genuine agreement, leaving schools reluctant to challenge clinical partners for fear of losing placement access for their students. We raise it here because it corroborates, from a different angle and nearly a year and a half before Indiana acted, the precise structural problem this comment asks the Commission to name. A copy of that letter is enclosed for the Commission's reference.

The coalition's own public account of that effort, published in the Brownstone Institute Journal on April 13, 2025, acknowledged that the clinical-site problem sat outside the Executive Order's reach and stated plainly that "the issue of continued mandates at clinical sites must be addressed." That gap remained open for nearly a year until Indiana closed it by statute in March 2026. This comment asks the Commission to close it nationally, for every state Indiana has not yet been joined by.

VI. Enforceable and Durable Protections

Guidance and public-awareness resources are necessary but not sufficient here, because the students affected by this gap are, by definition, already being told by an unreviewable third party that their exemption does not count. We ask that the Commission's existing enforcement recommendations be made explicit in reaching this population:

1. A clear complaint pathway, through the reporting hotline already recommended in the twelve key recommendations, for students whose exemption is honored by their school but denied by a clinical site or its third-party administrator.

2. Prompt review and interim relief where a student faces imminent dismissal from a program because of a pending or disputed clinical-placement exemption

denial, so that a single semester's clinical rotation does not end an educational career before a complaint can be resolved.

3. Investigation, compliance letters, and — where warranted — strategic litigation directed at third-party administrators and clinical sites that categorically deny exemptions or apply them inconsistently between students and employees at the same facility.

4. Extension of the report's proposed 30-day written-explanation requirement (Recommendation 3 of the twelve key recommendations) to clinical sites and their third-party administrators when they deny a student's religious or medical exemption.

5. Public reporting on enforcement actions in this area, consistent with the report's broader transparency recommendations, while protecting individual student privacy.

VII. Conclusion

The Commission's hearing record already shows it heard this concern from parents, and Indiana has already shown that closing it is legislatively workable. No student should be dismissed from a required clinical placement, after years of coursework and tuition, because a third-party administrator — once removed from the school that already granted the exemption — declines to honor it on undocumented grounds. No student should face a stricter standard than an employee working the same floor of the same facility. We ask that the final report name third-party clinical compliance administrators directly and point to Indiana's model, so that the protections already recommended in Chapters 9 and 10 reach the point where students are actually losing their education and their careers. We would welcome the opportunity to provide additional documentation as it becomes available, and thank the Commission for its consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Dian Dossias

Founder, Stop College Mandates

Enclosure: Correspondence to Secretary Linda McMahon (U.S. Department of Education), cc. Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), dated March 20, 2025.

March 20, 2025

The Honorable Linda McMahon
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

RE: Explicit Inclusion of Medical Training Schools in Executive Order 14132, "Keeping Education Accessible and Ending Covid-19 Vaccine Mandates in Schools" (February 15, 2025)

Dear Madam Secretary McMahon:

As you prepare to issue guidance as directed by Executive Order 14132, "Keeping Education Accessible and Ending Covid-19 Vaccine Mandates in Schools" (February 15, 2025), we respectfully urge you to explicitly name and include medical training schools—including schools of medicine, nursing, physician assistant programs, and other allied health professional training programs—as institutions required to comply with the order.

Rationale for Explicit Inclusion of Medical Training Schools:

1. *Historical precedent shows that without explicit mention, medical institutions often claim exceptional status and would likely do so in this case.* Medical schools technically are "institutions of higher education" under the 20 U.S.C. 1001(a) definition referenced in Section 2(c) of the Executive Order, even though they are not specifically named. Explicit naming of these schools in your guidance prevents these institutions from undermining the Executive Order by interpreting their status differently. One example can be found in the University of California (UC) system. UC adopted a system-wide opt-out policy for COVID-19 vaccines in May of 2023[1], yet some of the UC medical training schools continue to mandate COVID-19 vaccination for students[2] [3]. A more comprehensive list of schools continuing to mandate will be provided upon request.

2. *Naming medical training schools ensures equal protection for all students*: Medical science students face particularly intense pressure to comply with institutional mandates. They deserve the same freedom of choice regarding COVID-19 vaccination as students in other disciplines, especially given the career-ending consequences of non-compliance in their field.

3. *Clinical Requirements Argument No Longer Valid:* Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) officially eliminated COVID-19 vaccine requirements for healthcare workers through a

[1] https://ucnet.universityofcalifornia.edu/employee-news/uc-updating-covid-19-vaccination-policy-to-systemwide-opt-out-program/
[2] https://somsa.ucr.edu/required-documentation
[3] https://shc.uci.edu/new-student-information/immunization-requirements-medical-students

final rule published in the Federal Register on June 5, 2023 (88 FR 36485)[4], which took effect on August 4, 2023.

This federal policy change should render obsolete the long-cited argument that healthcare students require vaccination for clinical placements. However, many clinical training sites continue to impose their own vaccination requirements, continuing to create a significant barrier for healthcare education programs. These clinical partnerships are often maintained as a courtesy, placing educational institutions in a precarious position regarding advocacy for their students. Schools hesitate to challenge these vaccination policies for fear of jeopardizing valuable training relationships. Ensuring that medical training schools are explicitly covered under the Executive Order is an essential first step toward the removal of mandates at clinical sites for healthcare students.

4. *The scientific evidence increasingly questions the benefit-risk profile of mandates*:

1. A CDC-sponsored study in JAMA (Oster et al., 2022; DOI: 10.1001/jama.2022.0655) documented myocarditis risks in young males following vaccination.[5]
2. For college-aged individuals, a comprehensive risk-benefit analysis published in the Journal of Medical Ethics (Bardosh et al., 2022; DOI: 10.1136/jme-2022-108449) concluded that mandatory COVID-19 vaccination for young adults is not strongly supported by available evidence when considering potential harms against modest benefits.[6]
3. A study of 51,107 Cleveland Clinic Employees evaluating bivalent coronavirus vaccine protection found that "The risk of COVID-19 also increased with time since the most recent prior COVID-19 episode and with the number of vaccine doses previously received," suggesting that requiring updated shots might paradoxically increase infection risk.[7]

5. *Consistent Application*: Explicit inclusion would ensure consistent application of the Executive Order across all higher education sectors without leaving room for exceptional treatment of medical education institutions. This sends an unambiguous message that the claim that their unique role in healthcare delivery justifies exceptional treatment is not valid. Explicit inclusion would foreclose this argument.

6. *Neutralizes Conflicts of Interest*: The pharmaceutical industry has significant influence over medical education policy, often providing substantial funding to medical schools. Examples of such funding include the $30M Abbvie and Harvard Research Alliance[8], the $40-$100M

[4]https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/06/05/2023-11449/medicare-and-medicaid-programs-policy-and-regulatory-changes-to-the-omnibus-covid-19-health-care
[5] https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2788346
[6] https://jme.bmj.com/content/medethics/early/2022/12/05/jme-2022-108449.full.pdf
[7] https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2022.12.17.22283625v5
[8] https://otd.harvard.edu/news/harvard-university-abbvie-form-research-alliance-to-address-emergent-viral

Gilead-Yale Alliance[9] and the $2.4M Moderna and Harvard Alliance for RNA Therapies for the Modulation of the Immune System (ARTiMIS) which enables basic science research in the field of immunology using Moderna's mRNA and nanoparticle delivery technology[10]. Explicit inclusion would prevent industry-driven attempts to carve out special exemptions that undermine the Executive Order's intent.

7. *Ensures Compliance Across Substantial Funding Streams*: Medical training institutions receive billions in discretionary federal funding through NIH research grants, HRSA training programs, and other mechanisms. Clarity is essential to ensure compliance.

8. *Nationwide Shortage of Doctors and Nurses*: There is a well-documented shortage of doctors [11] and nurses[12]. Many prospective students abandon medical studies because of COVID-19 vaccination mandates. Removing this obstacle at the school level aids in the effort to reduce the nationwide healthcare worker shortage. If clinical sites were also required to rescind such requirements, it would relieve the burden on educational institutions, thereby fostering a more uniform policy across all training programs. The current healthcare shortage across the country is a significant concern, and vaccination mandates are contributing to students choosing other career paths. This trend not only affects the immediate supply of healthcare professionals but also poses long-term challenges for the healthcare system. By alleviating these mandates, we could encourage more students to enter the healthcare field and help address the growing shortages.

In conclusion, we respectfully urge the Department of Education to explicitly name medical training schools in its guidance for the Executive Order. The position that COVID-19 vaccination warrants special consideration in medical settings disregards two important factors. First, it overlooks scientific evidence showing limitations in preventing transmission. Second, it ignores the fundamental principle of medical autonomy—particularly for interventions with documented risks. Medical science students deserve the same protections of personal health choice as other students, regardless of their career path. Your leadership on this matter would provide necessary clarity and ensure the comprehensive implementation of this important policy. It would prevent continued mandates based on outdated assumptions, help address the critical healthcare worker shortage, and affirm the fundamental principle that personal medical decisions must remain with individuals—especially those who will one day provide essential healthcare services to our communities.

Respectfully submitted,

[9] https://medicine.yale.edu/news/medicineatyale/article/new-alliance-with-gilead-sciences-is-transformative/

[10] https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/newsplus/harvard-establishes-mrna-immunotherapy-research-collaboration-with-moderna/

[11] https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare/our-insights/the-physician-shortage-isnt-going-anywhere

[12] https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Fact-Sheets/Nursing-Shortage-Factsheet.pdf

Ryan Walker, Executive Vice President, Heritage Action
Leslie Manookian, President, Health Freedom Defense Fund
Sally Fallon Morell, President, The Weston A. Price Foundation (continued)
Leah Wilson, Executive Director, Stand for Health Freedom
Twila Brase, RN, PHN, Co-founder and President, Citizens' Council for Health Freedom
Lucia Sinatra, Co-founder, No College Mandates
Dr. Joseph Varon, President & Chief Medical Officer, Independent Medical Alliance (IMA)
Dr. Paul Marik, Chief Scientific Officer, Independent Medical Alliance (IMA)
Richard Amerling, MD; Nephrology and Internal Medicine; Academic Director, GoldCare
Dr. Dana Granberg-Nill, Chief Operating Officer, GoldCare
Jennifer Bauwens, Ph.D., Director of the Center for Family Studies, Family Research Council
Meg Kilgannon, Senior Fellow for Education Studies, Family Research Council
Jane M. Orient, M.D., Executive Director, Association of American Physicians and Surgeons

cc: The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Mr. Vince Haley
Director, Domestic Policy Center
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

From: Ethel Price <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:00:48 -0400
Importance: Normal

I SUPPORT SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE,* AND THE FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND THE FREE EXERCISE THEREOF AS STATED IN THE FIRST AMMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

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.

Thank you.

Signed,
Ethel E Price
Newport, WA
(USA Citizen, born in USA to parents also born in the USA.)

*"Yet **the phrase itself** [*separation of church and state*] **appears nowhere in the U.S. Constitution. Its power comes from a metaphor used by President Thomas Jefferson in an 1802 letter, which the Supreme Court later adopted as the definitive interpretation of the First Amendment's religion clauses."**
Separation of Church and State: How Jefferson's Wall Became Constitutional Law | GovFacts
[*Emphasis mine*]

From: Ken Williams <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Keeping Church and State Separate
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:01:16 -0400
Importance: Normal

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **Ken Williams** <[redacted]>
Date: Sun, Jul 12, 2026 at 9:55 PM
Subject: Re: Keeping Church and State Separate
To:o<[redacted]>

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:
I understand the Commission's concern about the Left's extreem positions. I only ask that the Commission also be very careful not to go too far on the Right either. History is a lesson book warning us not to go too far to the Left or to the Right. Didn't our American ancesters escape from their homeland in Euope that went too far to the Right and thus came to America to have to have religious freedom of choice for all religions. I'm concerned, as a pround American, that we be very careful that we not open the way for a repeat performance. You are corrrect that the separation of Church and State is not in the Constitution, but the principles are there. As a Christian Citizen of faith in Jesus Christ, I hold onto the First Amendment so that all religions can have the liberity of concscious and not fear that one group is favored or heard over the others. The Johnson Amemdment was enacted for that reason to restrait one church's politicing their Christian agenda through the government. Please be wise and fair in keeping the princples of Church and State separate. I'm for helping them both be free.

Sincerely, Ken Williams, Oregon

From: Sherri Nelson <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment-Separation of Church and State- Sherri Nelson
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:01:45 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I hope this letter finds you well.

I was deeply concerned to read that the Commission is considering replacing the wall of separation between church and state with a “bridge.”

As a Christian, I believe this proposal is contrary to both biblical principles and the foundational values of the United States. Many of our nation’s early settlers came to America seeking freedom from religious persecution. Their experiences helped shape a nation committed to protecting religious liberty and ensuring that every person has the right to worship according to the dictates of their conscience—or not to worship at all—without government interference or favoritism.

The separation of church and state is a vital safeguard that protects both religious freedom and the integrity of our faith communities. It allows people of all beliefs to practice their religion freely while preventing the government from promoting or favoring one religion over another.

I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve the wall of separation between church and state, which has long helped protect the religious liberty of all Americans.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sherri Nelson

PII
PII

Sherri
Sent from my iPhone

From: VE J <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report - Request for Review
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:02:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

Date: July 12, 2026
Method: Via Electronic Mail to [redacted]
To: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
Address: 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530
Subject: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

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Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

The separation of church and state stands among the nation's most enduring achievements—rooted firmly in the Constitution and essential to the preservation of American freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report threatens this foundational principle by suggesting that the historic wall between church and state be replaced with a bridge.

This wall was not conceived as a secular barrier against religion; it was established by people of faith to safeguard religious practice from government influence. Weakening that boundary risks placing religious institutions in direct competition for federal funding and political favor, while inviting conflict between church and state as each seeks greater authority. Such outcomes would erode the very liberties the Commission asserts it aims to protect.

The Commission's recommendations—including expanded government financing of religious activities and the repeal of the Johnson Amendment—would move the nation away from the constitutional balance that has long protected both religious freedom and democratic governance.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,
Valerie E. Johnson

From: LB Anderson <[redacted]>
To: "RLC"o[redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Please read this corrected response of mine with link regarding Separation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:02:48 -0400
Importance: Normal

We are writing a sincere and concerned email response in regards to the pending possible decisions being made to do away with the separation of church and state.

Our country has enjoyed the freedom to exercise one's conscience when it comes to how to worship, whom to worship and when to worship. America is known for the many freedoms that faith communities of every type are able to freely practice, and this makes for a more peaceable society overall in that society has been able to enjoy such freedoms without a King or dictator-without government crossing this very sacred line of the freedom of choice that God in his Biblical Word has given each and every one of us.

We can see clearly in God's Word that Christ led by example-he never coerced-He never forced people to come to him and/or worship him; Christ gave every man and woman a choice in that matter-and so should we as Christians follow Christ's example by allowing all people to follow the dictates of their own conscience, when it comes to how they wish to worship or if they wish to worship at all. Christ in His Word clearly said the following:

Matthew 22:20-22
20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?
21 They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

Christ's words in the above verse are quite clear that civil power should tend to it's own rulings-it's own domain, and likewise the church should do the same; and this we have done as a great Nation so beautifully over the past few hundred years-why change the religious freedoms that every man and woman has enjoyed in matters of true religious liberty?….lest we forget, when church and state were last united, persecution was the unavoidable -unfortunate result; and with human beings at the realm of trying to repeat a church state union-the Bible clearly predicts where this will lead-Please read Revelation 13, in particular 11 and 12.

Many of us do not wish for history to repeat itself; mankind is fallible, and church and state can quickly become a slippery slope where religious persecution-punishment can once again sadly be revived. I do not wish for any one person to have to go through this. Please reconsider where a unification of church and state could lead, and "will lead according to Bible prophecy".

Thank you for allowing us to express our opinion and thoughts on this matter; and I do want to express that our sentiment is very much shared with "Pillar of Freedom's comments, and the letter that a dear brethren wrote by the name of David Barron, which is far more succinct with historical mentions and very eloquently written, for which I will paste his letter-link right below in this email.

https://thirdangelsmessage.tv/free-44-page-booklet-from-separation-to-partnership-how-the-presidential-religious-liberty-commission-redefines-religious-liberty/?fbclid=IwcGRvZgNmZGlkFlCnPA0VqKgs2k1GTe86adTPnAIbnJpleHRuA2FlbQIxMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZAo2NjI4NTY4Mzc5AAEeUxJEgGDIyQV4PguDAu6thrC5C9_MHHgBbaGP6DoIpyolMXVBhjay76B6AF8_aem_VZjdIFfK54m8Ku8b0G6LHQ

Thank you kindly for your time.

Laura-Beth Anderson & John Pocock

From: Cheryl Allen <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:03:54 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I read that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge" and I find that very troubling. This country was founded by our ancestors who came seeking freedom from religious persecution enforced by a political/religious regime. I am a Christian, and while I believe our laws in regards to dealing with our fellowman to be founded on Christian principles, I also believe that our responsibility in relation to God is personal and cannot be governed by another whether government or church.
The wall between church and state wasn't built by secularists to keep religion down. It was built by believers to keep the church free. A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government money and
political favors to march right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering to politicians instead of to God. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it isn't good for either one.
Please don't build that bridge. Keep the wall. It protects the church more than it constrains it.

No political regime however in the right has a God given right to enforce its views of religion on individuals. Keeping politics and the church separate allows the churches members to worship according to conscience with a response to Gods love which is the only true worship.

Sincerely,
Cheryl Allen
Boring, OR

Sent from my iPhone

From: Becky Barcenas <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of Church and State- Rebecca Barcenas
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:08:01 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a citizen I am writing to ask you to not replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge".
As a person of faith, this is very alarming. History is very clear as to what happens when church and state join hands. When the churches receive moneys from the government, it takes control of the church and there is no freedom, it is weakened. Religious Liberty is the bedrock of all our liberties. Please keep church and state separate, keep the wall!

Sincerely,

Rebecca Barcenas

Salem, Oregon

From: Christopher Nelson <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment- Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:08:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I was deeply concerned to read that the Commission is considering replacing the wall of separation between church and state with a “bridge.”

As a Christian, I believe this proposal is contrary to both biblical principles and the foundational values of the United States. Many of our nation’s early settlers came to America seeking freedom from religious persecution. Their experiences helped shape a nation committed to protecting religious liberty and ensuring that every person has the right to worship according to the dictates of their conscience—or not to worship at all—without government interference or favoritism.

The separation of church and state is a vital safeguard that protects both religious freedom and the integrity of our faith communities. It allows people of all beliefs to practice their religion freely while preventing the government from promoting or favoring one religion over another.

I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve the wall of separation between church and state, which has long helped protect the religious liberty of all Americans.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Christopher Nelson
[redacted]

From: Enoch Hoover <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Commento- Religious Liberty Commission Report-Enoch Hoover
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:08:14 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Sir or Madam
I believe very hard and strong in the separation of Church and state. I want the very very best for our Country.
Sincerely Enoch Hoover.

From: Ethel Price <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:09:35 -0400
Importance: Normal

I SUPPORT SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE,* AND THE FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND THE FREE EXERCISE THEREOF AS STATED IN THE FIRST AMMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

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.

Thank you.

Signed,
E Price
WA State, USA Citizen, born in USA to parents also born in the USA.

*"Yet **the phrase itself** [*separation of church and state*] **appears nowhere in the U.S. Constitution. Its power comes from a metaphor used by President Thomas Jefferson in an 1802 letter, which the Supreme Court later adopted as the definitive interpretation of the First Amendment's religion clauses."**
Separation of Church and State: How Jefferson's Wall Became Constitutional Law | GovFacts
[*Emphasis mine*]

From: Kevin D <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT– [Chapter 2: Religious Liberty and the American Story] – [KEVIN D]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:09:57 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission.

Thank you so much for your time in reading this letter. I would like to respectfully express my concerns and disagreement with the recommendation that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment be reinterpreted to diminish the historic position of the Separation of Church and State in this country.

While it is true that this term does not appear directly in the U.S. Constitution, the Establishment Clause of the First amendment ensures that this country would have no privileged religious expression or religious faith. I myself am a Christian who believes wholeheartedly that Jesus is the answer and He is what the world and this country needs, however I believe we have to be careful not to do the work that only God can do in bringing conviction to the hearts of man. The Church has a role and the governments have their role and the two should be careful not to step over one another.

While it is true, this country has in ways departed from principles found in the Free Exercise Clause of our First Amendment by showing favoritism to some and bias against others as your Religious Liberty Commission Report points out; in spite of this, we don't want to step out of bounds. The tearing down of this separation could not only cause great division amongst those of Faith and those who don't ascribe to Faith in this nation, it could cause divisions and rifts through the various Christian denominations and Faith groups in this country as history has already shown us. This history can be seen in what has happened in Europe among the various Christian denominations and even briefly in the early history of the American Colonies. The history of Roger Williams, the great statesman, Christian Theologian and Founder of Rhode Island has shown us this clearly as well.

Please consider these concerns as the decisions that are made now could negatively affect us all in ways we may not realize today.

Thank you for giving this letter your time and attention.

Respectfully submitted,
Concerned Citizen
Kevin Dominique

From: "Living Life's Little Lessons" <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:10:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

From: Karissa <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - RE: RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION DRAFT
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:11:03 -0400
Importance: Normal

As a U.S. citizen who has studied the history and issues surrounding religious freedom, I am writing to formally voice my concerns and objections regarding recommendations #1 and #9.

The Founding Fathers' warnings of the dangers of a union of church and state, are clear in their writings, clarifying the meaning of the First Amendment to the Constitution, and its Establishment Clause.

The objective of the Religious Liberty Commission should be Religious Freedom and Freedom of Conscience for all Americans. The history of colonial America and Europe makes clear that the union of certain favored religions with the government ("church and state") has repeatedly resulted in the government enforcement of particular religious views, and the persecution of minority religious views. The First Amendment to the Constitution was written to prevent this travesty, by requiring U.S. government neutrality in matters of religion. Thomas Jefferson wrote, "...I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.' thus building a wall of separation between Church and State." [1]

Also I object to the suggested removal of the Johnson Amendment. Jesus Christ said, "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." [2] Here Jesus Christ established the vital separation of Church and State. James Madison stated, "...the morality of the Priesthood and the devotion of the people have been manifestly increased by the total separation of Church from State." [3] He observed, "In the papal system, Government and Religion are in a manner consolidated, and that is found to be the worst of governments." [4]

To preserve Religious Liberty for all Americans, I respectfully ask the DOJ not to adopt recommendations 1 and 9 of the committee draft.

Sincerely yours,
Harry J. Sharley, M.A.

[1] https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html – Jefferson here is referring to Congress. Congress is prohibited by the Constitution from making a union of church and state.
[2] Matthew 22:21, Holy Bible.
[3] James Madison, Letter to Robert Walsh, March 2, 1819.
[4] Ibid

From: Leah Crosby <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment-Separation of Church and State-Leah Crosby
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:12:09 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a pastor and proud natural-born citizen of the United States of America. As I have worked for non-profit religious organizations in twelve different states over the past decade, I've deeply valued our separation of church and state. It gives me the ability to speak freely according to my beliefs without government interference.

I am very deeply concerned about what is proposed in the Religious Liberty Commission and I object to it. I believe what makes America great is the freedom we have here to believe differently and worship God according to our conscience.

As someone who has studied religions and church history, and holds a Master's Degree in Pastoral Ministry, I am familiar with the dark history of religious persecution that took place in Europe. America became a safe haven for those who wanted to worship God differently than the Church of England. The wall of separation between church and state safeguards the freedom that our forefathers fought so hard to establish.

I believe that going forward with what is proposed would be a step backwards for our country and I am deeply concerned of the ramifications of it. For example, the bridge between church and state proposed opens the door for government money and political favors. This could lead to churches competing for grants and answering to government officials. As a pastor and person who values individuality and freedom, I am alarmed by the propositions in this report to build a bridge between church and State. I'm asking that you please reconsider it and keep church and state separate.

Sincerely,

Leah Crosby
Napa, California

From: Bob Backman <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Bob Backman
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:14:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

First of all, I want to thank all of you for dedicating many hours over the last year to wrestling with religious freedom and it's protection. I am 78 years old and received a light dose of "Dark Age" history, just enough to make me forever skeptical of allowing well meaning Christians unbridled power. My Baptist friends further grew my appreciation for religious liberty and the unique quality of American liberty, that is, for ALL religious, even the freedom to be Godless. We have observed state sponsored churches in Europe, which seems like a perfect plan to destroy the church.

When America first went to war with Iraq, I recall a news commentator say we needed to separate "church & state". Who can't see that need in the Arab world! Then my mind began to wander to my Christian brothers and sisters in America, and asked, should I feel any safer with them, given unchecked power? Because of that, I strongly urge you NOT to repeal the Johnson Amendment! And secondly, we don't need an expansion of funding of religious organizations engaging in religious activities. Politics need to stay separate from the church!! Remember our own early American history!

Please be careful with this great American experiment. Thanks for your ears! God bless you!!

Sincerely,

Bob Backman

Sandpoint, Idaho

From: Aspen Hoover <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment- Religious Liberty Commission Report- Aspen Hoover
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:14:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Sir or Madam,
I strongly believe that separation of church and state is crucial for peoples religious freedom to truly remain. This nation was built on freedom of expression, religious freedom, and freedom of belief, people fled from all over the world because of lack of freedom to believe what they would believe anyway no matter what anyone tried to tell them. The people who built the nation believed strongly in religious freedom and I believe the same. Every person should always have the ability to believe whatever they what to and never should be required to go against their own conscience. The reality is separation of church and state is something many people including myself believe in, no man, woman or creature of any kind should be required to go against ones conscience no matter what.

sincerely
~ Miss Aspen Hoover ~

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT— RE: RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION DRAFT
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:16:39 -0400
Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone

To: The Department of Justice

I am a loyal American and I am a strong Christian and firm believer in the separation of church and state.

Our country was established on religious freedom principles and separation of church and state! That is why this country has been so successful! People swarmed from the old country to America so they could be free and follow their conscience and worship God as they believed.

Historically if the church is controlled by the state there is persecution and laws trying to make them worship against their beliefs.

I would like to respectfully oppose recommendations numbers 1 and 9 of the Religious Liberty Commission Report draft.

We must keep Religious Liberty for all Americans!

Sincerely yours,
Lori Sharley

From: Dave Nelson <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:16:41 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 12, 2026
Via Electronic Mail to PII
Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530
Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Please seriously consider revising your draft proposal in which you suggest our government should further disregard the traditional and long standing principles of our first amendment: Keeping the government out of running churches and keep the churches out of running government. I am adamantly opposed to the public or government funding of religious nonprofit activities on public campuses, such as religious (universal or unique) clubs, schools, and I believe instead, that specific church or religious denominations, and its members should pay for their own activities through private freely offered donations. Tax payers should not be obligated to pay those expenditures.

It is precisely because a bridge has been built that further erosion is felt to be necessary: Because the state has acknowledged atheistic, evolutionary secular humanism (which is a religion being based solely upon subjective speculation and belief) as the primary established belief system that we now find ourselves in a position where we feel we need to extend that power to other religious philosophies, taking us directly back into the dark ages the founders of this country sought to exit through removing any religion from establishment while allowing every citizen and public official to directly influence the nation through the maintenance and expression of their personally held beliefs and their character.

If a philosophy is viable it does not need the government to fund, promote and force it upon the citizenry. Government involvement in religion cannot help by becoming coercive.

Why should public tax funds support any religious organization? If the adherents do not have sufficient conviction to support it themselves, why should the nation as a whole? We allow a tax deduction for religious contributions already. Why should a taxpayer that believes in one thing have to support an organization that believes another?

If we want to further support religious choice in education, simply exempt people who do not use the public school system from that portion of taxation.

Also, who decides orthodoxy? The majority? The politically and financially powerful? This completely undermines the basic premise of our constitution that a minority's rights have the same protection as the majority (within civil bounds). We see history repeated in Europe through the Roman Church and then in Ireland through the Church of England. In the end government establishment of both churches led to the same types of human rights violations, to varying degrees. We see this in the former Japanese empire with its established Shinto religion and in the communist countries with their established form of leader and government worship.

Our foundational principle of the separation of church and state dates back to Roger Williams and Rhode Island. It is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a recent doctrine. Any church/state coalition, like Dr. Frankenstein's creation in Mary Shelley's literary allegory, becomes a beast that consumes all we hold dear.

If there is anything history has taught us it is that a government establishing religion (belief system based on philosophical or metaphysical principles) of any kind leads to severe suppression of minorities and chilling abuse of the power that attends the government establishment. I believe we are seeing this now with the establishment of the evolutionary, secular humanist religion as the accepted social norm in our education, government and institutions. Please, do not further weaken our first amendment but strengthen it. I believe, informed by the testimony of history, that any move toward bridging religion with government will only further weaken the already tottering basic human right of liberty of conscience and freedom of speech we believe is an inalienable human right.

Sincerely,
David S. Nelson

PII

From: Tim Peters <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:17:49 -0400
Importance: Normal

To Whom it may concern,
Separation of church and state is important to all of us Americans. Please respect the wall of separation to protect all Americans freedoms.

Sincerely, Timothy Peters

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State Comments
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:18:17 -0400
Importance: Normal

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

The separation of church and state is a cornerstone of American freedom, rooted in the Constitution. The Commission's report on Religious Liberty raises important questions about the balance between religious liberty and government involvement. The first amendment guarantees us the right to our religious beliefs without prioritizing or giving privileges to one religion over another in the state office. Many of our founders did not want a state religion dictating how funds are used in our country.

My parents legally emigrated to the United States from Germany. Having gone through World War I and World War II, they experienced many freedoms being taken away. My grandfather was a banker but was drafted into both of these wars as a medic and suffered through the ravages of war. My parents and grandparents and other family members wanted a new life in America where they could assimilate and openly practice Christianity and have the freedoms everyone deserves. My parents taught their children truths from the Bible, the pillars of faith, and how important the separation of church and state is.

It is clear the wall of separation shaped early American thought. The First Amendment reflects this principle, protecting faith and preventing government overreach.

I urge you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken this separation -- specifically, using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment. When churches engage in partisan politics or accept government funding, they inherit political corruption. Separation protects faith, which is why religion has remained strong in our country. Please consider my disagreement before pursuing removing the phrase "separation between church and state" from public discourse.

Crista P. from California

From: Kimberly Eden <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - [Protest against the idea of separating church and state with the idea of building bridges] - [Eden S] .
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:29:28 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: To_the_United_States_Government_and_members_of_the_Religious_Liberty_Commission, .docx

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To the United States Government and members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (1Cor 1:3)

I respectfully submit this public comment as a concerned US citizen who is a Bible believing Christian belonging to a religious minority and who is a firm and sincere believer in the Protestant principles of absolute separation of Church and State and religious freedom.

“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's.” (Luke 20:25)

This is the Christian and Protestant principle of separation of Church and State, after which the founders of our country modeled the Constitution of the United States. The founders of our country established our government and modeled the Constitution upon the broad foundation of civil and religious liberty.

These principles are the secret of our power and prosperity as a nation. Millions from other lands have sought our shores, and the United States has risen to a place among the most powerful nations of the earth. Historically, the United States has been a refuge for the oppressed, a place where freedom of conscience is celebrated, and a prominent beacon of Scriptural truth, thanks to the protections of our Constitution that ensure liberty of conscience. Nothing is dearer or more fundamental to all who cherish religious liberty and freedom of conscience.

I was greatly alarmed and concerned to read the recommendations of the June 26, 2026 draft report of the Religious Liberty Commission to replace the idea of separating church and state with the idea of building bridges between them.

The Dark Ages stand as the great example of the fearful effects of the union of Church and State. During this period of religious persecution and intolerance, the Protestant Reformers had protested against a union of Church and State, the assumed right of the Church to use the power of the State, and the multitude of abuses growing out of it. The United States has its beginning as a nation as a safe refuge to people from Europe who were the victims of the abuse of a union of Church and State.

History has proven that a close alliance of church and state always

results in religious favoritism, religious intolerance, coercion and persecution of the religious minority by a religious majority.

Governments were ordained to keep men civil and to protect the persons and property of men and not to make them religious. To protect liberty of conscience is the duty of the State, and this is the limit of its authority in matters of religion.

The churches of the United States must never seek to employ or control the power of the state to enforce religious observances or dogmas by secular laws; to do this will be to dominate the conscience, which is a surrender of the principles of Protestantism and will only bring a national apostasy that will end in national ruin.

I therefore respectfully appeal and urge our Government and the Religious Liberty Commission to uphold the Christian principle of the absolute separation of Church and State, and to leave religious matters entirely to the individual conscience of each citizen.

Respectfully, Eden S

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This email has been checked for viruses by Avast antivirus software.
www.avast.com

July 13, 2026

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Respectfully, Eden S

From: Richard Sloop <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTo- Religious Liberty Commission Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:35:27 -0400
Importance: Normal

To Whom it May Concern,

In reviewing the preliminary Religious Liberty Commission Report, I am concerned about what seems to be a clear reappraisal and even "attack" on the concept of the "wall of separation" between church and state. It is suggested that this is not a highly important concept and the report seems to be an attempt to break down this "wall." I think this is a serious mistake. If the state is allowed to support religious institutions - then rules can be made that allow more support for certain religious institutions and less for others. Also - such support gives the government a foothold to encourage certain religious practices and discourage others. This is not the role of government in any way! I believe that maintaining the wall of separation between church and state is of the highest importance. And while it is appropriate for our elected officials to practice religion in their private sphere completely unimpeded by the state - it is inappropriate for them to practice religion as part of their official duties as this impedes the freedom of others who may work with them or under them to practice religion as they are convicted. We must realize that without this very important wall of separation - some religions will ultimately be prefered and others less prefered. And government should never prefer or encourage one religious practice over another. So I would strongly ask that the commision reaffirm the importance of this wall of separation as an indispensable part of our religious liberty.

Sincerely,

R. Richard Sloop

From: Kate Berlin <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Commentary on the Commission's Aim
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:40:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 13th, 2026
Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

The separation of church and state is firmly rooted in the first amendment to the Constitution. "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 peacably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

To make lawful a union of church with state will only incite the hubris of leadership to presume absolute control over its populous and decimate our country. It will lead only to political and religious treason.

It is my fervent hope that the commission will read a chapter in the book The Great Controversy entitled Liberty of Conscience Threatened, and, with a much greater effort to consciously examine the negative effects of the impending conflicts this union would cause.

That's the chapter following.

With kind regards.

Kate Berlin

From: John Barrett <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT on separation of Church and State draft report – John and Heidi Barrett
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:41:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission members,

We have strong concerns about your draft report, because it will serve to significantly weaken religious liberty.

For example, consider this quote from page 43 of your draft report: "A 'wall of separation' can wrongfully imply that church and state are opposed to one another and that they are completely separate, but in reality, the church and state strengthen and support one another."

Your statement flies in the face of the world's history between religious expression and the power of the state. Far too often, when the state attempts to “strengthen and support” areas of religion and faith, it is simply picking and choosing to support a particular flavor preferred by those in power at the time. When that happens, other flavors of religion and faith are marginalized, or worse, they are persecuted (whether one major religion over another, or whether one denomination over another).

History empirically proves this to be true. This history cannot be ignored!

We urge you to reconsider your recommendations and to support the clear constitutional position that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." (and by the way, the Executive and Judicial branches should also be constrained, as well, under the Congressional prohibition; that is, if Congress shouldn't tamper with religion, then the Executive branch has no business tampering and implementing something Congress didn't authorize, and the Judicial branch shouldn't create new interpretations or precedents tampering with religious expression either).

Let the government stay out of picking winners and losers in religion. Let religious freedom be the freedom to exercise or not exercise one's faith, completely free of government support, preference, bias, etc.

We will be assessing those who support your current draft report. If the report does not change, those supporters will not receive our support, whether they are elected officials, NGOs, or otherwise.

Thank you for considering our comments.

John and Heidi Barrett

From: david <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] SEPERATION OF CHURCH AND STATE
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:47:10 -0400
Importance: Normal

From the desk of
Dr. B

July 12, 2026

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
950 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Room 5706
Washington D.C. 20530

Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

Dear Sirs:

I would like to start with saying I appreciate what you might be trying to accomplish, and that is to stop and reverse the obvious moral decline in this country. As you might be aware historically, many famous empires have declined as a result of moral decay from within (i.e. Roman Empire, etc.).

I personally being of the Christian faith, do not believe that government and religion should combine forces. Just take a look at Islamic extremist states like Iran where the general public is forced to believe a certain way. My parents immigrated from Post World War II Germany to look for a better life in the U.S. They were also Christian in background and found that the separation of church and state worked very well for them and their children in the U.S.. The Nazi party was supported by the then predominately Christian German people (54% Protestant and 41% Catholic) and look what happened there!

Yes, the Secular atheists in our country have I believe led to a decline in the moral attitudes of our citizens. We should treat them like any other religion, but in recent years we have given them more power than other "religions". But this by no means means that we should now "Christianize" our government by taking down the wall that separates church and state. We are a Democracy not a Theocracy.

Our country has flourished for 250 years by having a clear separation between church and state. If that line gets blurred than history may well repeat itself in a not so positive way. Even Jesus did not mix religion with politics—"Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's". Matthew 22:21 ESV

In Conclusion, I would love to have everyone believe the way I do as a Conservative Christian, but I would hate it if it were forced upon anyone. I respect those who do not believe that way I do. I will try to show them by

genuine Christian love, that Christianity is the better way, but just like God, I will not force anyone to join my church or believe my beliefs.

Sincerely yours, Dr. B

Retired Family Physician.

From: Paula Haynes <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Paula W Haynes
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:48:13 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write because religious liberty matters to me, and because the Commission's report will shape it for years to come. As a 69-year-old citizen of our wonderful country, I proudly stand when our national anthem is played or sung, and my license plate reads "God Bless America." As a conservative Christian, I value the freedoms the United States has always stood for. One I treasure most is the freedom for every citizen to worship God when and how they choose, or not to worship Him at all. This freedom can only continue to survive if we as a nation continue to keep church and state separate. The government should never, for any reason, try to make laws that relate to when and how a citizen worships. I ask you to keep civil government out of the business of religion. My reasons are these:

The two religion clauses are one shield. As Jones warned the Senate in 1888, "It is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion." A law favoring religion today is a precedent controlling it tomorrow, and the machinery now proposed comes with no guarantee about who will operate it next.

There is no generic religion for the state to adopt. Even the Ten Commandments are contested ground — as Jones noted, "the difference between Protestants and Catholics with respect to the decalogue is irreconcilable." A mandated display must pick a version, making the government an arbiter among faiths — the very thing the Establishment Clause forbids.

Separation was the founders' deliberate design, urged on them by the churches themselves. Madison told the Virginia ratifying convention: "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 ask the Commission to honor that design, not explain it away.

Force can make hypocrites, never Christians — and state sponsorship corrupts the faith it favors. President Grant said it plainly in 1875: "Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the Church, and the private school, supported entirely by private contribution. Keep the State and Church forever separate."

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Paula W Haynes

From: Diane L <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Change in Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:48:14 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write because religious liberty matters to me, and because the Commission's report will shape it for years to come. I ask you to keep civil government out of the business of religion. My reasons are these:

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Force can make hypocrites, never Christians — and state sponsorship corrupts the faith it favors. President Grant said it plainly in 1875: "Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the Church, and the private school, supported entirely by private contribution. Keep the State and Church forever separate."

Religious liberty is a right, not a majority's permission. "A right is something which, in its very nature, is inherent in the one possessing it, independent of the will of all other persons." Popular support can justify a highway bill; it cannot justify a religious one, because religion was never among the things submitted to the vote.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Diane Loweke
Idaho

From: "David G. Shipowick" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Cc: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:50:36 -0400
Importance: Normal

Religious Liberty Commission Report.
With moral declension fast eroding the fabrics of society, it is natural for leaders in the church and government to look for solutions to the violence, crime and bigotry that are destroying our nation. The answer would seem to have the government support religious endeavors. This may seem innocuous at first—support for Christion schools, for charities, for hospitals etc. But it is always a slippery slope to the point where the government begins to favor certain religious groups and then begins to dictate what beliefs are acceptable and which are not.
We have the classic example of this in the Dark Ages where the church and state worked hand and glove together to propagate centuries of religious persecution—many wars and martyrs. It is a well-known fact that many of our early settlers fled Europe because of religious persecution. America was the land of religious freedom and opportunity.
We can see a modern example of this in the Islamic countries where the government and state are combined. Is there any religious freedom in these countries? If you have doubts just go and try to proselytize in those places. You will soon end up in jail or without your head.
So I say to the Religious Liberty Commission: Be as holy and as religious as you want to be. Pray for revival in your own soul and in the church. Support your church with your time and money, and prayers. But for Christ's sake, keep the government out of religion.

Respectfully Yours,

David G Shipowick MD

From: David Clover <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Religious Liberty Commission Report - David Clover
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:51:21 -0400
Importance: Normal

I strongly disagree with the recommended policies and direction outlined in the report of the Religious Liberty Commission for the following reasons:

- It completely distorts the historical record upon which the First Amendment to the Constitution was based. The founding fathers knew - based on European and New World experiences - that when church and state united, the result was intolerance of unauthorized opinions or religious views. They had seen how this intolerance resulted in persecution of minority groups, and undermined the moral legitimacy of governments. The First Amendment was *definitive*. The Federal Government could not speak to religious issues - nor could it restrict religious activity.

- The success of this bold experiment has been on view for the world to take note of. For the last 250 years, religious life has thrived in the United States. Nowhere else in the world is there such a vibrant, thriving display of religious strength and diversity as in this nation. Separation of Church and State has been good for both parties!

- I strongly support independent religious education. I am a product of parochial schools, and sent my children to parochial schools. This should always be an available choice for those who wish. BUT - as it is outside the publicly established school system, it must be privately funded. It should be freely available - but it cannot be free. To divert my tax dollars from the public school system, and grant them instead to a religious denomination not of my choosing is the equivalent of forcing me to pay tithe to that religion.

- The Commission's report fails to acknowledge the diversity of religious experience in the United States. It implies that only those within a narrowly fundamental Christian community have the kind of authentic religious life that brings blessings to the Nation. It thus devalues the true spiritual experiences of Native Americans, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and a host of non-mainstream Christian sects. Is God not at work in their lives and hearts?

The current report was fashioned by a commission comprised of Christian Nationalists - and the conclusions of the report expose the true aim of Christian Nationalism, i.e., to usurp the power of the Federal Government to give a small cross-section of Christian extremists a favored position in society. A position from which they will have the authority to judge others.

This entire process ignores the statements of Jesus that, "My Kingdom is not of this world." While the Commission seems intent on "saving" the United States, it ignores the fact that ***no nation*** will be saved into Christ's Kingdom. ONLY individuals are saved as they accept Jesus. AND THAT DOES NOT INVITE THE PARTICIPATION OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN THE PROCESS.

Sincerely,

David Clover

From: Olena Hadyniak <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Support for Religious Freedom and Freedom of Conscience
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:52:59 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for providing the opportunity for members of the public to submit comments.

I am writing as a Christian and as someone who deeply values religious liberty and freedom of conscience for every person, regardless of their faith or beliefs.

Throughout history, genuine religious freedom has flourished when the government has protected the rights of all people equally without favoring or establishing any particular religion. I respectfully believe that maintaining a healthy separation between the institutions of church and state is one of the strongest safeguards for the free exercise of religion.

Please ensure that any recommendations made by the Commission continue to protect the constitutional rights of every American to worship according to conscience—or not to worship at all—without government preference or coercion.

Religious liberty is a precious gift that belongs equally to people of every faith and to those with no religious affiliation. I respectfully ask that the Commission preserve and strengthen these protections for present and future generations.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Respectfully,

Olena H.
California

From: John Palsgrove <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Please uphold church and state separation
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:53:40 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for receiving comments from the public on the draft report. I write to ask the Commission to uphold the separation of church and state — the arrangement that has kept faith in America both free and strong. My reasons are these:

Christ himself divided human duty into two jurisdictions: what we owe our neighbors belongs to civil law; what we owe God lies beyond it. As A. T. Jones told the United States Senate in 1888, "civil government is civil, and has nothing to do in the matter of legislation, with religious observances in any way." I urge the Commission to keep every recommendation on the civil side of that line.

American government holds only the powers the people could delegate — and no person can delegate his relationship to God. Religious authority was therefore never among the powers the people could give, and what was never given was never received. The First Amendment did not create that exclusion; it recorded it.

The founding generation's own Congress already examined this question. The reports of Richard M. Johnson's committees, adopted in 1829 and 1830, declared: "It is not in the legitimate province of the legislature to determine what religion is true or what false. Our government is a civil and not a religious institution." I ask the Commission to align its report with that precedent.

Force can make hypocrites, never Christians — and state sponsorship corrupts the faith it favors. President Grant said it plainly in 1875: "Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the Church, and the private school, supported entirely by private contribution. Keep the State and Church forever separate."

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
John Palsgrove
Idaho

From: Vildan Sitdikov <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State - Vildan Sitdikov
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:55:31 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I have come across the recent announcement of the draft report on the topic of the union of the church and state and its desired plans to be implemented in near future. As a citizen of the United States, the country which stands firmly on the Biblical principals and the Constitution, I ask you to reconsider this effort of uniting the powers of the church and the state. The United States of America has been successfully improving and growing without this union. As a result of that, people from different parts of the world seeking religious freedom due to the persecution were finally at peace when they were given a freedom to exercise their faith in this blessed country. The same principle is found in the Bible where God is giving every person a freedom of choice rather than limiting one's freedom to one way. I strongly value the constitution of the United States and the freedom of religion and speech we, the citizens, exercise today. May God help you to prayerfully come to the decision which may help this country to help growing and letting people get acquainted with God by having the church and the state separated.

Sincerely,
Vildan Sitdikov,
Tacoma, Washington

From: Paul Chung <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:57:24 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of the religious liberty commission,

Is it true that the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty is trying to develop the concept that the separation of church and state is a myth and does not exist and has never existed. I object to that fallacy. I believe Church and State need to be separate. No government should support a particular church or religious belief.

God be with you. Thank you for reading my note.

Paul Chung
Sent from my iPhone

From: Anya Kinsleye[redacted]
To: "RLC (OASG)" [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTe- Establishment Clause
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:57:52 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission,

I write as a citizen who believes deeply in both religion clauses of the First Amendment, and I respectfully ask that you preserve the liberty of conscience they were designed to protect.

I do so not merely because I believe these protections are constitutional, but because I believe they are profoundly biblical. Christ Himself divided human duty into two distinct jurisdictions when He said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Civil government was given authority over our duties to one another, but no authority over the duties we owe to God. Christ Himself drew that line.

As one witness testified before the United States Senate Committee on Education and Labor in 1888:
"There is a limit to the lawmaking power; and that limit is the line which Jesus Christ has drawn. The government has no right to make any law relating to the things that pertain to God, or offenses against God, or religion."

The only proper question for civil government is whether an action is civil or uncivil—not whether it is religious or irreligious. The moment government places its authority behind a religious text, display, exercise, or lesson, it crosses the very boundary Christ established between Caesar and God.

This leads to a second principle that should concern religious and secular citizens alike: every law touching religion—even one intended to favor it—ultimately diminishes religious liberty.
A religious law must define the religion it protects. In doing so, government necessarily determines which beliefs qualify and which do not. Some are included, while others are excluded. Even those who benefit no longer practice their faith entirely by right, but increasingly by government permission.

As was said plainly before that same Senate committee:
"No man can ever safely consent to legislation in favor of the form of faith or worship which he himself professes. In so doing he resigns his right to profess some other form of faith if he should become convinced that other form is nearer the truth than his own."

Those who welcome government support for their own faith today should pause and ask themselves a simple question: Who will possess that same authority tomorrow? History has repeatedly shown that once government acquires authority over religion, it rarely exercises it equally, and almost never surrenders it willingly. There is also the practical question of what coercion can actually accomplish.

Religion is the work of conscience and the heart. Law may compel attendance, reward conformity, or punish dissent, but it cannot produce genuine faith. Throughout fifteen centuries of established Christianity, the union of church and state weakened both religion and civil society.

James Madison observed that ecclesiastical establishments produced:
"Pride and indolence in the clergy; ignorance and servility in the laity; in both superstition, bigotry, and persecution."
Likewise, President Ulysses S. Grant urged the nation to:
"Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the Church, and the private school, supported entirely by private contribution."

Government has never strengthened authentic religion by compelling it. A faith that depends upon the power of the state has already begun to lose the very thing that makes it faith.

Finally, I respectfully ask the Commission not to regard the separation of church and state as some later invention or modern reinterpretation. It was a deliberate constitutional design, shaped by men who had witnessed the abuses of religious establishment firsthand and encouraged by churches that had themselves suffered under government control.

James Madison declared before the Virginia Ratifying Convention:
"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."

Any claim that the Founders intended government-sponsored religion must first explain away Madison in Madison's own words.
As you consider changes and amendments to words that those who have come before us so carefully and prayerfully created, I ask that you give them the honor and dignity they deserve. Do not erase the blood, sacrifice, and conviction that gave birth to these rights and has preserved them at such great cost.

I believe we have entered into a type of civil war—not one fought with muskets and cannon, but one of principle and thought, of ideologies and values. In that light, I ask you to consider the words of Abraham Lincoln:

"...our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion, that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

We have not yet pitted ourselves against one another with arms or poured out the blood of our countrymen in the streets—and I pray we never do. But if we continue down the path of compelling conscience rather than protecting it, history reminds us that we are not as far from such divisions as we would like to believe.

Whether we are religious or secular, conservative or liberal; left or right, majority or minority, we all share one fundamental right: the freedom of conscience. It belongs equally to every man, woman, and child. Government did not create this freedom; it merely recognizes and protects it. Its responsibility is not to stand between an individual and God, but to preserve every person's liberty to seek, worship, believe, or refrain according to the convictions of conscience.

Please do not violate this sacred right. Do not tarnish this precious freedom. Trample not upon the very foundation of the constitution. Preserve for yourselves, for others and for future generations the liberty that birthed our existance as a nation.

Respectfully,
Anya

From: Mona McFarland <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:01:06 -0400
Importance: Normal

My faith is NOT OF MAN!!! My faith is in Our Lord Jesus Christ!!! Bible states Psalms 146:3 Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal man, who cannot save. Jeremiah 17:5 Cursed is the man who trust in man and makes flesh his strength. You have all deluded yourselves thinking that you have power to wield over the children of God. If you so believe that you will be proven powerless. The only government that exists is the government of God. Long established and unchangeable!!! God says He will NEVER touch our FREEWILL choice. He doesn't force humanity to worship against the dictates of their conscience. Everyone knows you can"t make people abide by your demands in the form of a law. If God doesn't accept forced love what give you the authority over God to do so. Your plans have been revealed long ago as prophecy in Revelation. As Jesus says in
Ecclesiastes 1:9 what has been will be again, what has been done will be done again, there is nothing new under the son. God's word NEVER CHANGES!!! So gentleman RENDER ONTO CAESAR WHAT IS CAESAR'S and ONTO GOD WHAT IS GOD'S.YOU'll NEVER USURP GOD'S POWER. Learn of our SAVIOR JESUS and lay up your treasures in Heaven where moths and rust does not corrupt. A concerned follower of God for the billions that don't know Him yet. He's coming back very soon to rescue His faithful servants. Don't miss your chance to be counted among them. Mona

Sent from my iPhone

From: Nurse Becky <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Rebecca Decker
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:09:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen of Fairview, Tennessee, who cares about getting this right for everyone, not just for people who share my own faith. I keep thinking of something President Grant told an audience in Des Moines in 1875: that religion belongs with the family, the church, and the private school, kept up by private giving, and that church and state should remain apart for good. That instinct, from a man who had just finished defending the Union, still strikes me as sound public policy, and I hope the Commission will take it seriously rather than treat it as a slogan from another century.

Consider first why government was excluded from religion in the first place. Our whole system rests on the idea that government holds only the powers the people gave it. But no person can hand over his relationship to God to anyone else, not even to a government he trusts. A man can appoint an agent to manage his farm or his business; he cannot appoint anyone to believe for him or answer for his soul. As one nineteenth-century writer on these questions put it, since no person can delegate any power in things religious, it follows conclusively that the Declaration of Independence logically excludes religion in every sense and in every way from the jurisdiction and from the notice of every form of government that has resulted from that Declaration. That is not a technicality about established churches. It means the government never received religious authority to begin with, so there is nothing for the First Amendment to have merely narrowed.

Christians in particular should feel the force of the second point, because it comes from Christ, not from any secular theory. When Jesus said to render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's, he drew a line between two jurisdictions, civil and religious, and put religion on the far side of it, permanently. As one advocate summarized it before Congress, that which is Caesar's is to be rendered to Caesar, that which is God's is to be rendered to God alone, and with that which is God's, Caesar can have nothing to do. A commission that recommends government sponsorship of prayers, texts, or religious instruction is not honoring that teaching. It is crossing the very boundary it claims to defend.

There is also the matter of where rights come from. If religious liberty exists only because a majority currently favors it, then it can be taken away whenever the majority changes its mind, and it was never truly a right at all, only a temporary permission. Our tradition says otherwise: rights are inherent, granted by the Creator, and government exists to protect them, not to distribute them by vote count. Man's first and highest allegiance in all things is due to his Creator; therefore, the domain of conscience is one which human government, whether of one or of many, has no right to invade. Popular government exists to protect minorities and individuals precisely because majorities can already protect themselves at the ballot box.

Finally, I ask the Commission to weigh what happens even when legislation favors religion rather than restricting it. Any law touching religion must define which religion counts, and that definition excludes someone, while even the favored believer now practices his faith by permission rather than by right. As one witness told a Senate committee considering Sunday legislation, it is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion. Believers who welcome government backing today should ask who will hold that same power tomorrow, under a different administration and a different creed.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Rebecca Decker
Fairview, Tennessee

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendations of Religious Liberty Committee submitted Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:12:02 -0400
Importance: Normal

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the recommendations of the Religious Liberty Committee submitted to President Donald J Trump on June 26, 2026.

As I was taught in 8th grade civics class in the 1960's, the 1st amendment to the Constitution states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or the free exercise thereof".
It was as easy to understand in the 8th grade as it is now.

We were also taught by our teachers and parents that where my freedom ends yours begin. We were taught Christian values of love and respect for others no matter what they believe. I practice today and I have taught that to my children and model it for my grandchildren.
I am living out my Christian faith of love for all of God's children. To do anything less is anti-Christ's teachings.

All of Jesus's teachings reflected God's respect for relationships, the value of people and the responsibility of Christina

From: John Baerg <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Separation of church and state- John L Baerg
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:13:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Please reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state. Please keep church and state separate.

If you proceed, this will only lead to corruption in politics which is bad for both church and Country. Please keep both free.

Please don't use government money to fund religious activities.

Please don't repeal the Johnson Amendment.

Sincerely,
John L Baerg
Fresno, CA

From: Gladwin Mendez <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Gladwin Mendez
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:13:55 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write from Kaitoke to urge you, in the strongest and most respectful terms, to preserve the wall between government and religion rather than lower it. My concern is not hostility to faith. It is the opposite.

My first argument is drawn from Christ's own words, which I take seriously as a matter of conscience, not merely as a historical curiosity. When Jesus said to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's, he divided all human duty into two jurisdictions. Civil government enforces duties owed to fellow men; God alone holds jurisdiction over duties owed to him. This means the state is not simply advised to leave religion alone as a matter of policy preference — it is barred from that territory by the highest authority a Christian recognizes. The only question government may ever ask of an action is whether it injures a neighbor's rights, never whether it is pious, impious, or heretical. Murder and theft are punished as civil injuries, not as sins. When a commission recommends that government put its weight behind a religious text, display, or observance, it crosses a line that Christ himself drew — and the objection is that this is forbidden by the very faith it claims to serve, not that it is too religious for secular tastes.

My second argument concerns what happens even when religious legislation favors the majority's own faith. Any law touching religion must define which religion it favors, and that definition necessarily includes some believers and excludes others — while even the favored group now practices its faith by legislative permission rather than by right. A believer who welcomes a law establishing his own creed has surrendered something precious: the freedom to change his mind if conscience or further study leads him elsewhere. He has legislated against his own future convictions. This is why the strongest witnesses against Sunday laws and similar measures were often believers testifying against establishment of their own observance, understanding that the wrong lies in religious legislation itself, regardless of whose doctrine it happens to favor. Anyone celebrating today's favorable law should ask who will hold this same power tomorrow, under a different administration and a different creed.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Gladwin Mendez
Kaitoke

From: James Henderson <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Cc: Jim Henderson <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:14:25 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the RLC and Dr. Ben Carson:

I am responding to the July 13, 2026, deadline for members of the public to provide their input to the commission. I would remind the committee that the Founding Fathers had a specific understanding of the phrase “Separation of Church and State” or, as Jefferson obtained it from Roger Williams, “A Wall of Separation between Church and State,” despite the fact that the phrase was not used as such in the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution.

Please allow me to elaborate on the subject, as the concept has been deliberately muddied, flipped on its head, and weaponized by modern jurisprudence.

Roger Williams and the Original "Wall"

Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island, wrote in 1644 about a **"wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world."** Crucially, he understood this as a *one-directional* barrier — it protected the church from state corruption, not the state from religious influence.

Williams was a devout Puritan who fled Massachusetts precisely because the civil government presumed to punish religious offenses. His argument was jurisdictional, not secular. The state had no competence in matters of the *first table* of the Decalogue — man's duties to God. But he never suggested the state should be neutral toward the *second table* — man's duties to man.

Here is a snapshot distinction between the subject matter of the first table and the second table: d

First Table (Commandments 1-4)	Second Table (Commandments 5-10)
No other gods before Me	Honor father and mother
No graven images	No murder
Not taking God's name in vain	No adultery
Keep the Sabbath holy	No theft, false witness, coveting

The state has zero jurisdiction over the first table. Worship, conscience, belief— these are between man and God, and the civil magistrate has no competence to adjudicate them. But the second table governs civil society itself. Murder, theft, perjury, adultery — these are the proper domain of the civil law.

Madison's Memorial and Remonstrance

Madison understood this distinction very well. His *Memorial and Remonstrance* (1785) was written in opposition to Patrick Henry's bill to levy a general tax to support "teachers of the Christian religion."

Madison's argument was not that religion and government should have nothing to do with each other. His central argument was jurisdictional:

"The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate."

He argued that the civil magistrate's authority extends only to the *rights of property*, not to matters of the soul. The state cannot compel worship (first table), but it must still govern moral conduct between men (second table).

Madison's main points in the Remonstrance are instructive:

1. Religion is a duty owed to the Creator, not to civil society — the state has no jurisdiction.
2. If religion is exempt from civil authority, how much more is it exempt from legislative majorities?
3. Established religions corrupt Christianity itself (echoing Williams).
4. The bill violates equality — why should Quakers and Mennonites fund Episcopal teachers?
5. The bill implies the civil magistrate is a competent judge of religious truth.
6. Christianity flourished under persecution; establishment breeds laziness and corruption.
7. Establishments produce hypocrisy and state-sponsored religious strife.

Note what's absent: any argument that the state should be secular, neutral toward religion, or prohibited from acknowledging God. Madison's objection was jurisdictional, not abstract or polemic. Yet we cannot expel Christian beliefs and values from the public square, under the delusion that we are "Separating Church from the State," while knowingly legislating into law the pagan beliefs of Plato or any other religious philosopher and pretending that their views are "secular" and are therefore not in violation of the "Church and State" or a prohibition of the rights of conscience of dissenting individuals. The courts err today in attempting to impose so-called "secular" religious ideologies upon the public.

The Jurisdictional Distinction in Practice

The founding generation understood this. The same Congress that drafted the First Amendment:

- Opened sessions with prayer
- Funded chaplains for the military
- Authorized the printing of Bibles
- Called for days of thanksgiving and fasting
- Reauthorized the Northwest Ordinance, which declared: *"Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged"*

None of this violated the "wall" because none of it compelled worship or established an ecclesiastical authority. **The state was acknowledging God's existence and office as Creator and dispenser of our unalienable rights and moral duties, as reflected in our founding document, the Declaration, and not administering the sacraments or directing men's consciences**. This is important for the very existence of unalienable rights imparted by the Creator, itself limits the jurisdiction of the state, not just in its administrative functions as a Republic, but also in religious matters pertaining to the rights of conscience.

What Changed in 150 Years

The Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947) ripped Jefferson's "wall of separation" metaphor from its context and weaponized it. Black's majority opinion claimed the First Amendment "was intended to erect a wall of separation between church and State" that must be "kept high and impregnable." This was a complete inversion — Williams' garden wall protecting the church became a prison wall excluding religion from public life.

The jurisdictional distinction between the two tables was collapsed into a blanket prohibition on religious influence in public affairs. This is precisely why we now have absurdities like school administrators debating

whether a coach can silently pray on a football field after a game.

Summary

The founding generation understood the separation as primarily **jurisdictional, not abstract**:

- The state cannot compel worship, conscience, or belief (first table — Godward duties)
- The state must govern conduct between men (second table — manward duties)
- The state may acknowledge and encourage religion insofar as it supports public morality
- The "wall" protects religion from state corruption, not the public square from religious influence

This is a far cry from the modern "separation of church and state" that treats any public acknowledgment of God as a constitutional violation. The founders would find that interpretation incomprehensible — and frankly, tyrannical.

James Henderson, Esq.

Insearchofhistory.org

From: Irina Turlea <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – [Irina Turlea]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:17:57 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was troubled to read that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." With respect, that is exactly backwards — and as a person of faith, I find the idea alarming.

That wall wasn't built by secularists to keep religion down. It was built by believers to keep the church free after coming to the United States to secure their freedom from religious persecution.
A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government money and political favors to march right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering to politicians instead of to God.

My family and I came to America due to religious persecution in communist Romania. We have first hand experience with the overbearing hand of government in religious matters, narrowly escaping with our lives. We came for freedom to practice our faith without government interference. Please keep America the land of the free!

History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it isn't good for either one.
Please don't build that bridge. Keep the wall. It protects the church far more than it constrains it.

Sincerely,

Irina Turlea

Banning, California

From: Edward Tristan <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:20:54 -0400
Importance: Normal

I was there at the rededicate 250 event there was a collaboration between Protestant and Roman Catholicism. Protestantism will in this act join hands with popery; it will be nothing else than giving life to the tyranny which has long been eagerly watching its opportunity to spring again into active despotism.

The leaders are concealing the true issue, and many who unite in the movement do not themselves see whither the undercurrent is tending.... They are working in blindness. They do not see that if a Protestant government sacrifices the principles that have made them a free, independent nation, and through legislation brings into the Constitution principles that will propagate papal falsehood and papal delusion, they are plunging into the Roman horrors of the Dark Ages.

In those churches which he can bring under his deceptive power he will make it appear that God's special blessing is poured out; there will be manifest what is thought to be great religious interest. Multitudes will exult that God is working marvelously for them, when the work is that of another spirit. Under a religious guise, Satan will seek to extend his influence over the Christian world

Young men and women will be lifted up, and will regard themselves as wonderfully favored, called to do some great thing. There will be conversions many, after a peculiar order, but they will not bear the divine signature. Immorality will come in, and extravagance, and many will make shipwreck of faith.

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

The prophecy of Revelation 13 declares that the power represented by the beast with lamblike horns shall cause "the earth and them which dwell therein" to worship the papacy—there symbolized by the beast "like unto a leopard".... This prophecy will be fulfilled when the United States shall enforce Sunday observance, which Rome claims as the special acknowledgment of her supremacy....

Political corruption is destroying love of justice and regard for truth, and even in free America rulers and legislators, in order to secure public favor, will yield to the popular demand for a law enforcing Sunday observance.

From: Salómon <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Religious Liberty Commission - Solomon
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:22:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

Astute members of The United States Department of Justice Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to you today that I might bring before you some ideas that could be helpful in your efforts to find the best outcome.
It is my understanding that the Religious Liberty Commission has understood the Constitutional Amendments to read in a way that would allow Congress to pass laws that would/could add or hinder the free exercise of religion in the United States. I would respectfully ask that you consider that our First Amendment states in part that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion" It is my understanding that that would allow any religious affiliation or person to exercise there religion in a way completely separate from the government as long as it didn't brake the "laws of the land".
It is my hope that you might see that what our Founding Fathers set up was a Country that was made great by removing its self from the diseased system of a state church in the old word to a better system where by industry and culture could grow in a healthy environment!
Thank you for your time and I wish you all the best.
Sincerely,
Solomon

From: Gail Fisho[redacted]
To: "RLC (OASG)" [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Protect separation of Church and State, prevent enforcing any Law To Establish a State Religion on any of it's Citizens!
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:22:57 -0400
Importance: Normal

Please let it be known I believe in Separation of Church and State protected by the Constitution of the United States for the Free practice of their Citizens religious beliefs or no belief and allowed to freely practice those beliefs according to ones own conscience!

From: Cristina Turlea <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Separation of Church and State-Cristina Turlea
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:23:37 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:
I was troubled to read that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." With respect, that is exactly backwards — and as a person of faith, I find the idea alarming.
That wall wasn't built by secularists to keep religion down. It was built by believers to keep the church free. It was an idea set up by those who ran away from religious persecution by the state that governed the church. A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government money and political favors to march right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering to politicians instead of to God. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it isn't good for either one.
Please don't build that bridge. Keep the wall. It protects the church far more than it constrains it. Sincerely,
Cristina Turlea
Banning, CA

From: goeasy1234 <[redacted]>
To: RLCo<[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:28:16 -0400
Importance: Normal

I respectfully request that as you read my letter you will consider maintaining the separation of the State and the church. It is fine to have Christians working in the state, but the state should have no Authority in the church. It will only bring persecution. Our religion is personal between ourselves and God as he would have it. God does not force anybody to worship Him. Therefore, we have no right to legislate religion for another man, each man's religion is maintained by his own conscience with God. The union of church and state is spoken of in the Bible in Revelation chapter 13 called the mark of the beast. It is forced religion. The reason it has to be forced is because the Holy Spirit is not with this movement and to maintain order they have to resort to force. God forbid. Jesus never told anybody to go out and force people to become followers. He told us to go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey all that I have told you. Matt. 28:20. The disciples clearly understood that this did not include any Force. Just read what Peter said...
"2Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." 1Pet. 5:2, 3. We are to be examples of the Lord Jesus Christ when he walked and ministered in this world. And as Jesus and the disciples were persecuted for the Everlasting gospel message, we too will be persecuted by the state when the church is United to the state and they use Force to unite all men into one form of religion, but the followers of Jesus will not fight back, but rather, in the love of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, give the Everlasting Covenant message to this Dying World and the warning to not receive the mark of the beast. If you want to understand this more clearly, get the book The Great controversy written by Ellen G White. It is an accurate account of the history of the church and the great Reformation from the oppressive Church in the Dark Ages when the church had the Authority of the State. Yes, Bible prophecy does say that our nation will adopt the characteristics of the Beast which forced people upon pain of Death To Worship according to their dictation, but this will bring in the judgments of God and this will be the final battle in this world. The decisions that men make regarding receiving the mark of the beast, or the Seal of God, is the final test of faithfulness to God and His Commandments. This test will determine if we will be saved in God's Kingdom, or if we will be lost eternally and destroyed in the Lake of Fire. So yes, my vote is that we do not Unite Church and State. God may allow this to happen, but it is not His will. Read the book of Revelation from chapter 12 to the end and you will see it's all about how to avoid receiving the mark of the beast. God bless all of you that read this commentary. Look forward to seeing you in the Kingdom when Jesus comes to receive his own. Thank you for your consideration.

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:30:16 -0400
Importance: Normal

I strongly disagree with the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty"s draft report,
1. I object funding religious non-profit activities.
2. I object to funding religious education and religious clubs on public campuses.
3. I object to repealing the Johnson Amendment, which restricts church's political activities.
4. I request that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced.

5.I object to the special treatment given Jewish people and the state of Israel, and whether you desire complete neutrality in the government's relationship with religion.

I came to the United States because this country has a separation between church and state. That principle makes an enormous difference in protecting religious liberty.

In Russia, the official church is the Orthodox Church, and it is supported by the government, the police, and other state organizations. I personally witnessed what can happen when one church is given that kind of power.

When my father was conducting evangelistic meetings in a local theater, members of the official church hired groups of young men to disrupt the meetings. They threw eggs and rotten vegetables onto the stage, shouted insults, and tried to frighten the people who came to hear the presentations. The police did nothing because they supported the official church.

Our home was also broken into, and many of our belongings were stolen. Someone sprayed our dog with a chemical that left him blind. My brother and I were afraid for our lives.

In other towns, young people who were simply distributing Bibles and Christian newspapers were caught and beaten with leather straps by individuals connected with the church and local authorities. Those experiences left a lasting impression on me.

It is a frightening thing when a church is supported by the state. When one religious organization is given government power and protection, it can misuse that influence to intimidate, silence, or harm people of other faiths without being held accountable. No one truly has religious freedom when the government chooses to support and fund one church over others.

Please protect America's religious liberty. The separation of church and state is one of the reasons this nation is so special. It allows people of every faith—or no faith at all—to live without fear of persecution.

Please keep America free. Please preserve these liberties for our children.

From: Emily <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Emily Lewis
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:33:07 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Please reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state. Please keep church and state separate.

Look back through history. Every time government and church power has worked together, it's only brought persecution to all kinds of people, Christian and non-Christian alike. The role of government is to protect our God- given rights and liberties, specifically religious liberty. They often need to utilize force to maintain peace.

The Christian church's role has always been to follow Christ and to point others to Him, showing Jesus's love and inviting the lost to find a relationship with their savior. Jesus was never forceful. Love cannot be forced. The Christian church must never hold such power as to compel anyone to believe or to do anything that goes against the conscience.

Please keep both church and state separate and free. The citizens and non-citizens of this country must be allowed to freely exercise their religious beliefs and customs as long as these actions do not harm others.

Please don't use government money to fund religious activities.

Please don't repeal the Johnson Amendment.

Sincerely,
Emily Lewis
Napa, CA

From: Mia P <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTo– Establishment Clause – Mihaela Ioana Pantelimon
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:34:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern,

Dear sir, madam

I value the liberty of conscience for which our predecessors suffered and died.
While being a good citizen and value the world in all we live the freedom to worship God according to my beliefs is an alienable right given by the Creator.
No government or political system has the authority over this matter!
History has proven this over and over again. That when state officials dictate on the matter of conscience there will be persecution for those who believe differently.
The human heart needs the individual work of the Holy Spirit to be a good person and citizen. The laws that dictate how to worship will create hypocrisy as no human law can change the heart.

From: David Allen <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - David Allen
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:35:52 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am responding to the open invitation for feedback pertaining to the idea or concept of conjoining "Church and State." While I would love to see the ten commandments openly displayed in public, this is a slippery slope for bigger problems. A wall of separation needs to exist, not a roadway, railroad or bridge. Because if separation isn't done, then another group wants equality and their ideology on open display and favoritism. The Quakers and other Protestants fled England, looking for liberty of conscience and freedom to practice their religion. However I can think of a few bad ideas that have surfaced over time as examples of why this can tread into an area where there is persecution, discrimination, and even death.

1) 330 AD — Constantine, a Roman Emperor, moved the seat of his empire eastward from Rome to Constantinople (Istanbul today). He set up a seat of authority in the Western Roman empire for a papal church representative, the bishop of Rome at the time. The state chose a state religion which was Catholicism. This was a union of church and state. Over the years, the papal power manipulated the civil power of what was pagan Rome to do her bidding, dishing out punishment to heretics who would not go along with the church's doctrine.

2) Noahide laws — these do not come from Noah from the Bible, but from Maimonides (Moses Ben Maimon), a Sephardic jewish rabbi from the 1100's AD, man-made. They are generated from jewish thought to mandate over the Gentiles (non-jews). At face value, it seems similar to the ten commandments as there are seven of them. But there are upwards of 100 sublaws. The problem here is we have one religion looking to "lord" over another one (Christianity) and dictate morality in their eyes. The largest problem is that you only need one male witness and in the Talmud it is permissible to lie about a Gentile. Believing in Jesus Christ will get you killed and the punishment is BEHEADING. They also have a law that allows them to set up justices and court systems to dish the punishments out.

A few decades ago, you had Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994), a Hasidic Rabbi resurrect these. And modern Judaism is looking to carry them out into the future.

Here is where the union of church and state happens:

In April 1992, Senator Joe Biden pushed these to pass through the Senate and Congress then passed J.J. Res 104 which was then signed into law by President George H.W. Bush; Public Law No. 102-14. This passage was to commemorate the 90th birthday of Rabbi Schneerson and the excuse was for the ethical values of a civilized society which was the basis for our nation to be established. However, it allowed the government to technically kill you for the crime of worshipping Jesus Christ.

3) Maryland Toleration Act, September 21, 1649 — punishment of death for "blaspheme God, that is Curse him, or deny our Saviour Jesus Christ to be the son of God, or shall deny the holy Trinity the father son and holy Ghost, or the Godhead of any of the said Three persons of the Trinity or the Unity of the Godhead, or shall use or utter any reproachful Speeches, words or language concerning the said Holy Trinity, or any of the said three persons thereof, shall be punished with death and confiscation or forfeiture of all his or her lands and goods to the Lord Proprietary and his heirs."

Additionally, there were penalties for profaning the Sabbath or Lord's Day (Sunday) as well.

The problem the above is that the "trinity doctrine" was not taught by Christ, was man-made almost 300 years after his death, and John who wrote in the book of Revelation "Lord's Day" was a Jew and the Lords Day was the seventh day Sabbath, Saturday not Sunday.

4) 1888 — An attempt to legislate a National Sunday Law by Senator Blair arguing on behalf of establishing a Sunday law to sustain from work and dedicate it for everyone to worship on that day -- Fiftieth Congress, Second Session, Messages and Documents No. 43, 0. 73-102, before the United State Senate Committee on Education and Labor, Washington DC, December 13, 1888.

This was argued by a church representative of a protestant faith, Alonzo T. Jones. I have this in detail if you would like a copy. (Project 2025 by the Heritage Foundation reeks of this same path)

I am opposed to government partiality and funding of anything in the religious realm. If the Johnson Amendment is at question, I request for it be upheld and enforced. Because where there is a social mixer of religion and politics, you have corruption and innocent lives will be affected.

Sincerely,

David Allen

From: Vincent Brandon Verzosa <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Vincent Brandon Verzosa
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:43:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a concerned citizen, a citizen of the Christian faith, to ask that you reconsider the recommendations in your report which could actually lead to infringing on essential religious liberties. I can affirm some of the recommendations, such as the 11th recommendation, because they truly do represent taking a stand to ensure our citizens' religious beliefs are respected rather than trampled upon. The one recommendation that should be reconsidered is the 9th recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment.

My Christian faith has always advocated for the separation between the church and the state and I believe that repealing the Johnson Amendment would break down that God-ordained separation. As a Christian, I believe God wants the church and state to be separate because He wants people to follow Him willfully without any compulsion by outside forces like the state. Ever since Christ established His church, His true church has won people to the Christian faith by their living witness and by their preaching. Christ never advocated for His followers to utilize politics or the state to advance His movement, He called them to invite others into a relationship with Jesus Christ and to teach them how to be like Christ.

My fear is that by repealing the Johnson Amendment, politicians that receive support from religious bodies will likely be influenced to enact legislation that those religious bodies advocate for. This could easily result in trampling upon the religious liberties of minority religious groups if religious observances are legislated. I think the Johnson Amendment protects religious liberty because it ensures religious bodies do not influence state officials to advance their system of faith at the expense of the faith of others. I believe that Martin Luther touches on the subject of Christians focusing on preaching, rather than advancing political agendas or legislation, to advancing Christian principles. . .

"We must leave the matter in God's hands. His word must act, and not we. And why so? you will ask. Because I do not hold men's hearts in my hand, as the potter holds the clay. ***We have a right to speak***: we have *not* the right to act. ***Let us preach***; the rest belongs unto God. ***Were I to employ force, what should I gain? Grimace, formality, apings, human ordinances, and hypocrisy***.e. . . But ***there would be no sincerity of heart, nor faith, nor charity***. Where these three are wanting, all is wanting, and I would not give a pear stalk for such a result. . . . God does more by His word alone than you and I and all the world by our united strength. God lays hold upon the heart; and when the heart is taken, all is won. . . . ***I will preach, discuss, and write; but I will constrain none, for faith is a voluntary act.*** See what I have done. I stood up against the pope, indulgences, and papists, but without violence or tumult. ***I put forward God's word; I preached and wrote—this was all I did.*** And yet while I was asleep, . . . the word that I had preached overthrew popery, so that neither prince nor emperor has done it so much harm. And yet I did nothing; the word alone did all. If I had wished

to appeal to force, the whole of Germany would perhaps have been deluged with blood. But what would have been the result? Ruin and desolation both to body and soul. I therefore kept quiet, and left the word to run through the world alone." -Martin Luther

I stand with Luther on this! The reason I stand with Luther on this is because Jesus Christ Himself was put to death by an unholy influence between a religious group, the Jews, and the Roman state. Although the Roman officials did not find anything wrong with Jesus, they crucified Jesus because "When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising [from the Jews], he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.'" Matthew 27:24. I simply fear that repealing the Johnson Amendment may result in an unholy influence of a religious majority on politicians at some point to enact legislation that could infringe upon the religious liberty of other religious groups.

Sincerely,

Vincent Brandon Verzosa

Santa Rosa, California

From: Delicia Adams <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State - Delicia Adams
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:43:54 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was very troubled to read that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." With respect, that is exactly backwards — and as a person of faith, I find the idea alarming.

From what history's shown us, that wall wasn't built by secularists to keep religion down. It was built by believers to keep the church free. A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government money and political favors to march right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering to politicians instead of to God. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it isn't good for either one. We just need to look at European history throughout the ages, to see how the union of church and state seemed good at the start, but later lead to intense oppression and often eventually the persecution of those it was intended to support and protect.

Even the founding and settling of America is deeply intertwined with those who fled their home countries in order to experience religious freedom. Weakening or removing the wall will undo the centuries of protection the separation of church and state has provided for generation. The scriptures show that Christ upheld this principle of separation of church and state when he stated to give to Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and give to God the things that are God's (Matt. 22:21). Christ also respected the freedom of choice to not receive his people, teachings, or ways, while instructing his disciples who were about to go out and share the Gospel. If it was not accepted, they were to shake the dust off of their feet (Matt. 10:14), not orchestrate circumstances politically to ensure the people follow the words of Christ.

As America goes, so goes the rest of the world.

Please don't build that bridge. Keep the wall. It protects the church far more than it constrains it.

Sincerely,
Delicia Adams
Alberta, Canada

Sent from Outlook

From: Tony Augustine <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Absolutely opposed
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:44:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

Hello, I've been watching carefully as this country has changed from a nation founded on principles established to protect the rights of its people regardless of their faith, into something that demands compliance thru what is in my view the very opposite of what the title "Religious Freedom " might imply. On the surface it might seem like a good idea to have God and his law brought into the government run institutions but the danger is in reality that it bids the question as to who will teach it? As beautiful as our Loving Savior's Jesus Christ message is, it for the last 2000 years has been debated, argued over and in many ways altered in its interpretation leading to conflict. There is a reason Martin Luther protested Followed by breakaways and a march towards the perceived correct view of biblical context. It has established many opposing Religions within the Christian movement. Not to mention radical ideas that gave birth to fanatical groups such as Jim Jones and David Karrasch! We all know how they ended up.
Our Founding Fathers put in writing the laws of "separation of church and state" for a very important reason. One that should never be taken lightly. And not tampered with. They experienced for themselves a Government that had a church authority directly involved and knew that to be truly free that It must be left as a personal choice and not dictated by Government. It also insured that as a government, "religion" would, thru individuals who lived by their faith run Government.
If you need examples Look no further than Islam in Iran or Afghanistan as an example of how the ideology dictates their policy solely on a belief structure with no freedom to choose otherwise unless you choose execution by beheading! So my fellow Americans. Do we really want to see something like that in our country? We have the ability to stop this madness and see to it that no such thing exists under ANY religion within our borders. Don't misunderstand me when I say this. Christianity has seen its own dark history and because of its Diversity cannot be directed in singularity without conflict. Debate amongst churches of different views is one thing but to think that all of a sudden we have each other figured out leads to the next point. We don't. There will only be forced policies based on which religious group has the strongest political power and with corrupt intent disguised as freedom, as stated "Forced" The opposite of Free
When examining another truth In the beloved law of God in Exodus. We see Jesus meaning behind his rule to Love God and to love others. It essentially is his own recognition of separation of church and state. As we look at the story of how Pilate even in Roman days also knew of this separation as he found no fault in Jesus because the first 4 had no man made laws against it. But not so of the last six which essentially is the case today in America But of the first 4. None of their laws condemned. people used the power of the state to convict Him for breaking Gods law of Having no other gods before Him (Blasphemy) Could this sort of thing happen again? If we close the gap on separation it will undoubtedly mean persecution!

On a personal note our family had a letter written dated 1808 where a Baptist minister and family member was drawn and quartered for refusing to stop teaching his Baptist ministry by Another Christian group that I'll refrain from calling. His Name was Alexander Carter.

So am I as a Christian opposed. I think you have my answer!
Sincerely Tony Augustine

From: Joyce Keller <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Do Not "Bridge" Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:45:07 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: JK_liberty_letter_7.12.26.docx

To whom it may concern,

Please share the attached letter with The Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty.

Thank you.

Joyce Keller

don't forget to SMILE, it increases your face value.

July 12, 2026

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty

US Department of Justice

950 Pennsylvania Ave. NW

Room 5706

Washington, DC 20530

Dear Members of the United States of America's Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty,

I'm writing this simple request to ask that all government policies and actions please continue to honor the First and Fourth Amendments of the US Constitution by preserving the separation of church and state. This is the only way to protect the constitutional rights of all US citizens equally.

The First Amendment guarantees several freedoms, including the freedom of religion. This country was initially established because settlers were fleeing the oppression by the religious hierarchy in their native homeland.

Balance is needed in all that we do, unfortunately, over the last few years, we have been witnessing a slow, and now rapid rise of government and religion merging. With this merging, we are seeing religion take on more of a leading role in the government. The holy bible speaks of rendering to Caesar, what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's, indicating that they each have their place. To take what belongs to one and give to the other would cause an imbalance, and this is what the US government is embarking upon, IMBALANCE!

Your proposed action can only lead to this great country becoming a place where all people will be required to have one religion, and it appears that that religion is Christianity. While I myself am a Christian, I do not have a desire to force all people to be Christians, it is wonderful to know that I/we all have the power of choice without retribution. If this merging of church and state become law, I/we will no longer have this choice, for if I should decide to no longer be a Christian, I fear that I will be forced to remain a Christian, or be penalized, or even prosecuted. This brings me to the protections guaranteed to all US citizens in the Fourth Amendment.

If I am forced to worship the religion mandated by the US Government, and I refuse, your impending decision will effectively render the Fourth Amendment null and void, because the government(police) will have the authority to penalize and/or prosecute me.

I know this may sound farfetched, but this decision of the government, if carried out, which is my reason for writing this letter, makes this scenario not so farfetched. I was born and raised in the United States of America, a place where liberty and justice is afforded to all people on this

soil, and even the proposal to merge church and state, makes me shudder. Free Will will have left the building if the decision is carried out.

I ask of you again, please continue to honor the First and Fourth Amendments of the US Constitution by preserving the separation of church and state. This is the only way to protect the constitutional rights of all US citizens equally.

Yours Most Sincerely,

Joyce M. Keller

Tennessee

From: Barry Feldman <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTo- Establishment Clause – Barry Feldman
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:49:35 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a private citizen who cares about keeping both halves of the First Amendment's religion clauses intact, because I believe they were designed to work together, not against each other.

Every tradition of religious reflection on this question converges on one insight: religion is heart-work, and no statute can reach the heart. A law can compel attendance at a service; it cannot compel belief. History confirms this is not just a theory but a record. Fifteen centuries of established Christianity in Europe produced, in James Madison's own accounting, pride and indolence in the clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, and in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution. That is the actual fruit of state-sponsored faith, not a hypothetical risk. Worse, establishment corrupts the favored religion itself, trading converts of conviction for converts of convenience, and trading the power of God for the power of the police. Even Ulysses Grant, no theologian but a president who had seen the country through crisis, counseled that the matter of religion be left to the family altar, the church, and the private school, with church and state kept forever separate. I would ask the Commission to weigh that counsel heavily. State-sponsored religious instruction would not revive American faith; it would hollow it out, while handing the actual content of that instruction to whichever political majority holds power at the moment.

This points to a deeper problem with any argument from popularity. If a right can be granted by majority vote, it can be withdrawn the same way, which means it was never a right at all, only a permission. Our constitutional tradition holds instead that rights are inherent, and that man's first allegiance is to his Creator, a domain no government, however elected, may invade. Popular government exists precisely to protect minorities, not to reflect majorities, because majorities can always protect themselves at the ballot box. When it was argued to Congress that most Americans favored a particular religious measure, an early congressional committee answered that the Constitution regards the conscience of a solitary dissenter as sacred as that of an entire community. That principle should still govern us. Popular support may justify a highway bill; it cannot justify a religious one, because religion was never a fit subject for majority vote.

This is why I believe any law touching religion, even one meant to help, ultimately narrows free exercise. Such a law must define the religion it favors, and any definition excludes someone, while even those it includes now practice their faith by permission rather than by right. A believer who welcomes government endorsement of his own creed today is handing a precedent to whoever holds office tomorrow, including those who may not share his convictions at all. Religious liberty must include the liberty to change one's mind, and no legislature should be allowed to freeze one generation's convictions into law at the expense of the next generation's conscience.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Barry Feldman

From: Johan Fredrik Hansen <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] comment
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:59:05 -0400
Importance: Normal

I agree with pillar of freedom's comments. Please implement them.

From: Eva Hayes <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - (Eva Hayes)
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 03:07:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a concerned citizen of the United States requesting that you not move forward on making recommendations to repeal the Johnson Amendment nor suggest that the government provide funding for religious non-profit activities. God ordained the two institutions to coexist not to commingle. The separation of church and state needs to remain as such in order to protect individuals of faith from the influence of political agendas and compromising their liberty of conscience and religious freedom.

Please consider my request in regards to this matter.

Sincerely,
Eva Hayes
Columbus, Ohio

From: Mary Purdy <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT -- Separation of Church and State -- Mary Purdy
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 03:09:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

It concerns me that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge between the two. As a person of faith, I am against that idea.
It opens the door for government money and political favors to come in and compromise the integrity of churches, eventually resulting in their competition for grants and having to answer to politicians rather than to God.
We must learn from history how the union of church and state does not turn out well for either group.
Please keep the wall of separation between church and state to protect the church and religious freedom in our country.

Sincerely,

Mary Purdy
Powell, WY

From: morabgirl [redacted]
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church & State separation
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 03:13:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

Hello!

I would just like to ask that the wall of separation between church & state be left intact. We don't need or want bridges between church & state. Although the specific words of separation between church & state are indeed not stated in the Constitution, it is definitely implied.

Thank you for your attention to this matter!

Respectfully,
Sara Rhudy

Sent from my Galaxy

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT–SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE–AUBREE W.
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 03:16:43 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a Christian and an American, I declare unequivocally and unapologetically that I believe in the separation of church and state.

Regardless of how well intended someone may be in combining the two, the result is always the same—persecution. Throughout Biblical history and even more recently, one can find the result of church and state united. The King of Babylon Nebuchadnezzar declared every person in the empire must worship his golden statue, the three Hebrew men refused, and they were thrown into the fiery furnace. King Darius of the Medes declared that no one could pray to anyone other than himself for 30 days, Daniel worshipped the God of heaven as he always did, and he was thrown into the lions' den. In Persia, the king gave an edict of the genocide of the Jews, but God used Esther to save her people. Every disciple of Jesus was persecuted and almost all of them were murdered by the Roman Empire because of their religious convictions and preaching. The Lord Jesus Christ was crucified by the Roman Empire because He proclaimed Himself to be the Son of God.

Certainly in more recent history, we find that church and state only come together to persecute God's people. During the Dark Ages, the Roman Catholic Church persecuted anyone who was not Catholic: Muslims, Atheists, and especially Protestants.

This country was founded to free people from the religious tyranny that began with the church-state of the Roman Catholic Church. This is why James Madison said, "The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."

I fear for this nation should it take this step, "But [my] citizenship is in heaven, and from it [I] await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (**Philippians 3:20, ESV**).

My hope is in the Word of God and on it alone can I stand. I know my God is mighty to save, and He does not need any government from this sinful world to convert the souls of men and women all throughout this land. I believe in the power of the Gospel and the freedom to choose.

For these reasons, I object to the following:

- Government funding for religious non-profit activities
- Government funding for religious education and religious clubs on public campuses
- Special treatment given to any group based on religion, whether Jewish or otherwise
- Repealing the Johnson Amendment

I, therefore, request that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced.

May God have mercy on the individual souls of this nation.

Sincerely,
Aubreed W.

From: Barclay Jayakaran <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause & Church-State Separation – Barclay Jayakaran
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 03:24:03 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission and the U.S. Department of Justice,

I am Dr. Barclay Jayakaran, a Christian Evangelical researcher, Bible teacher, and student of eschatology (end-time studies) writing from Chennai, India. I write as an international observer, and as one of the many Bible-believing Christians outside the United States who watch American religious-liberty policy closely, because of the historic role the United States has played as a global example of ordered liberty between church and state.

I respectfully but firmly object to the draft report's recommendation that the Department of Justice issue guidance dismantling the "wall of separation" understanding of the Establishment Clause, and to related recommendations — including support for state-funded religious displays and instruction in public schools, and the erosion of limits on partisan political activity by houses of worship. I ask the Commission to withdraw these recommendations from its final report.

1. Separation of church and state is a biblical principle, not merely a secular one
Scripture itself distinguishes the authority of civil government from the authority of God. When religious leaders tried to trap Jesus over the question of paying taxes to Rome, He answered: "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). This teaching draws a clear line: civil government has a legitimate but limited sphere, and it is not the same sphere as the Kingdom of God. Jesus also told Pilate plainly, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36)o— refusing to let His mission be absorbed into any state apparatus, and refusing to let the state absorb His authority into itself.

The New Testament consistently keeps these two authorities distinct rather than fused. Where they have been fused throughout history — from the persecution of the early church under a state-sponsored imperial religion, to the persecution of dissenting Protestant believers by state churches in Reformation-era Europe — the result has not been the protection of true faith but its corruption and the oppression of conscience. A government that formally entangles itself with religious authority inevitably ends up deciding whose faith is acceptable and whose is not.

2. Scripture warns that a future fusion of religious and political power will be used to coerce and oppress, not to protect

Revelation 13:15–18 describes a governing system that compels worship and, further, restricts ordinary economic participation — buying, selling, earning wages — to those who submit to its mark. Ephesians 6:12 reminds believers that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against... the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" — spiritual forces that Scripture indicates work through, and are not limited to, earthly political structures. Psalm 2 depicts the rulers of the earth conspiring together against God and His anointed — a warning that political power, even when it invokes religious language, can set itself in opposition to God's actual purposes rather than in service of them.
I do not raise this to make a specific claim about any individual or office. I raise it because these texts are precisely why Bible-believing Christians should be the *most* cautious — not the least cautious — about a state formally absorbing religious authority into itself, even when it is done in the name of protecting religion. History and Scripture both indicate that when church and state merge, it is ordinary believers, and especially religious minorities, who eventually pay the price.

3. The nation's founders explicitly rejected church-state fusion, for religious as well as civil reasons

- Thomas Jefferson, in his 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, described the First Amendment as building "a wall of separation between Church and State" — a phrase he used specifically to reassure a Baptist minority that the federal government would never dictate matters of conscience.
- James Madison, in his *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments* (1785), warned that it is an "arrogant pretension" for the civil magistrate to act as judge of religious truth or to employ religion as an instrument of civil policy.
- The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1786) warned against "the impious presumption of legislators and rulers... who have assumed dominion over the faith of others."
- George Washington, writing to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport in 1790, pledged a government that gives "to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance" — a promise that depends on government not privileging one faith community over another.
- Article XI of the 1796 Treaty of Tripoli, ratified unanimously by the U.S. Senate, stated plainly that "the government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."

These were not secular figures hostile to faith; several were devout men who nonetheless understood, as a matter of both theology and statecraft, that formal separation protects religious liberty rather than threatening it.

4. Conclusion and request

I ask the Commission and the Department of Justice to:

1. Decline to issue guidance that redefines or narrows the Establishment Clause's separation of church and state;
2. Decline to support litigation compelling religious displays or instruction in public schools;
3. Preserve existing limits on partisan political activity by tax-exempt religious organizations; and
4. Recognize that formal church-state fusion has historically harmed, not protected, the free exercise of faith — a lesson Scripture itself teaches and one the founders took seriously.

Religious liberty is best protected precisely where church and state remain distinct. I urge the Commission to reconsider these recommendations before finalizing its report.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Barclay Jayakaran, Christian Researcher and Bible Teacher Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

From: Cheryl A <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Separation of Church and State-Cheryl Andersen
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 03:27:09 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a person of faith I am deeply concerned about the direction this country is headed regarding religious liberty. I see from history when you weaken the wall between civil and religious authority that it eventually leads to what other countries in this world currently suffer. The greatest recent example in history was the dark ages in Europe (which was all about lack of religious liberty), which ended when this great nation of ours was being created. Do we wish to turn around and repeat history and go back into the dark ages? Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

Please keep the Johnson Amendment intact and don't allow government funding of religious activities.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Andersen

Grants Pass, Oregon

From: Jeff Bentley <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Recommendation 1- Instruct DOJ to issue guidance clarifying proper understanding of separation clause
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 03:28:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

Religious Liberty Commission,

No, please a thousand times no. How my heart breaks to see this effort to fix what is not broken. If a “bridge” is made in the separation of church and state, then we must change the slogan from Make America Great to Make America Break, for this will be the sure result. It is in keeping government and religion separate that this country, against all odds has thrived and become great. The Religious Liberty Commission will also have to change its name to the Religious Persecution Commission, for when church and state are united or “bridged”, persecution is always the sure result.

My French Huguenot ancestors under the church state rule of Louis XIV in the 1500’s were forced to either convert to Catholicism or flee as refugees. They fled to America for the freedom of a country without a king and a church without a pope-civil and religious liberties. If this so called bridge takes shape there is no place left to flee, for there is no country on earth that enjoys the complete separation that we do here in my beloved country, and St. Bartholmew’s Day type Massacres will ultimately ensue.

“The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe with blood for centuries.” James Madison
Please don’t meddle with it.

When I have travelled abroad I have experienced what it is like for people to live under fear and oppression for merely desiring to live

by the dictates of their own conscience. For example, when preaching the pure and simple gospel of the Bible in Malaysia-a Muslim country-I did so under threat of arrest should any of the Muslim population hear the truth and be converted. I don't want to experience that here when I preach. BTW I have literally kissed the ground upon arriving on our home shores after traveling to countries devoid of our freedom from government meddling in matters of religion and religion meddling in matters of government. The latter is what the Bible calls an adulterous act by the church-seeking the power of government in place of the power of God. "With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication…"
Revelation 17:2

"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.
Benjamin Franklin in a letter to Richard Price. October 9, 1790.

I might also say that the commission is in dire need of brushing up on their history. I have read your draft, and I don't believe your 1947 statement is made in ignorance, and if it is, how vast the ignorance. Other letters I have seen go into great detail on this point, so I shall not belabor it.

You might think the idea that your efforts would ultimately result in persecution is a "bridge"too far-pun intended-but looking at history, we see oftentimes the uniting of church and state took place with small and gradual steps, but it always ended the same. Your proposal is just such a step toward an eventual precipice.

I don't know if there is a certain number of letters you have in mind, or some empirical historic evidence or eloquent writing that might spur the commission to reconsider their plans, but I would respectfully appeal to you as fellow Christians to at least allow your

countrymen a larger platform and more time than the two weeks given to raise our voices and turn you from this folly. A rightly informed public, if given the opportunity to VOTE on this matter, I perceive would soundly defeat it.

Much much more could be said but it is my prayer you get so large a response you cannot possibly read all the lengthy diatribes.

May God Help Us,
Jeff Bentley

From: Fanny Shives <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Religious Liberty Commission Report - Fanny Shives
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 03:40:36 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment on the draft Religious Liberty Commission Report.

I appreciate the importance of protecting every person's right to freely practice—or not practice—their religion. Religious liberty is a fundamental American freedom that deserves strong protection for people of all faiths and for those with no religious affiliation.

I am concerned, however, that some recommendations in the draft report regarding the Establishment Clause and the relationship between religion and government could weaken the long-standing constitutional principle that government should neither establish nor favor a particular religion. Throughout our nation's history, the separation of church and state has helped safeguard religious freedom by ensuring that government does not interfere with matters of conscience or give preference to one faith over another.

I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve a balanced understanding of the First Amendment by protecting both the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause. These two constitutional protections work together to ensure that all Americans enjoy equal religious liberty.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

Fanny Shives

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – RELIGIOUS LIBERTY DRAFT – SHANNON DANNER-MUNGER
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 03:41:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Committee<

I am writing regarding the draft report on religious liberty. I am sorry, but I must ardently disagree with this statement for many reasons. There are numerous historical examples that show the danger of merging church and state. During the dark ages people fled to the United States seeking religious freedom because there was no separation and the church controlled the state which led to persecution and loss of freedoms and the death of many at the hands of the state because of the dictates of the church. Today this is demonstrated in many Muslim countries where the religion controls the state and there are very limited personal freedoms. Our worship or non-worship is a matter of personal choice and we should be free to practice or not practice according to our own conscience.

I am a Christian and believe in religious freedom, as did Jesus. He only wants us to worship Him because we love him not because we are forced to. Jesus never legislated matters of conscience when it came to worship.

If there is to be a bridge between church and state, then which church would that be? What if the religious tenets decided on with this bridge violate the freedom of a minority or those of a different religious persuasion? While the 1st Amendment does not use the exact phrase "separation of church and state", it still embodies those principles. It restrains the government from interfering with the free exercise of religion, from endorsing a specific religion and from religious oppression of any individual. Bridging that separation will remove the protections of individuals, instead focusing on what either the majority wants or the decisions of those in charge. This amendment is one of the foundations of our country that make us different from most of the rest of the world in ensuring individual freedom of conscience.

When the government gets involved with religion, it turns religion away from being Christ-centered. I find it alarming that some religious organizations or schools receive taxpayer money. Mixing the two has a corrupting influence. Creating that bridge paves the way for further government funding which leads to competition for political influence or control. It leads the churches to answer to the government instead of God. The repeal of the Johnson amendment would have the same effect, as it could encourage donations to government officials through religious channels with little personal accountability but with "strings" attached.

I believe this move to pull down the "wall of separation" as both Roger Williams and Thomas Jefferson referred to it will negatively affect individual religious freedom.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

From: Charles Knecht <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] response to Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 03:59:53 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Commission:

I am a Christian American Citizen opposing your plans to first weaken then eliminate the separation of Church and State. We don't need to change the government this way. The Separation has been our policy since the founding, and can be seen between the lines of the whole constitution.

Leave well enough alone. It's very dangerous to attempt this. We don't need the State getting into our churches, compelling consciences.

Most sincerely,

Charles Knecht
Loma Linda, California

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Sent with https://mailfence.com
Secure and private email

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 04:08:15 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: July_2026,_RDS_Response_to_the_Presidential_Commission_on_Religious_Liberty.docx

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To: **The U.S. Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, July 12, 2026**

At: [redacted]

Regarding Public Comment on: SEPARATION OF CHURCH and STATE

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

It is note-worthy, that the commission is comprised of a number of respected and recognized members. Thank you for the work you have put into this project so far. However, there are serious issues that remain.

Introduction:

There are many aspects that the Commission appears to rightly conclude. However, it's evident that other aspects cry out for a balanced *representation* and *input*. Further serious re-evaluation and re-consideration is very much required in some areas. The **Wall** between Church and State that protects religious freedom from undue secular influence, should reinforced and strengthened - not allowed to be degraded, broken down and replaced by a **Bridge** between the secular and religious. The latter would result in disaster, as evidenced by history.

History:

I represent the 14th generation from John Sibley, who with his brother Richard, came to America in 1629 with Winthrop's fleet to escape religious persecution. They fled from a highly *civilized* country in Europe where Church & State were bound together as one; where freedom of religion did not exist, and where torture and death resulted for many who resisted in Church-State countries. This is not just a true story of my family; THIS IS ACTUAL HISTORY – as it also was for more than just tens of thousands who were persecuted, tortured and gruesomely killed.

As Christians, they came to America, where freedom-of-conscience to worship God - free of secular governments-of-men trying to manipulate or legislate spirituality - how they should worship and relate to God. Here in America, they could freely live the spiritually-based convictions they cherished, made possible under the of **Separation of Church and State**; demonstrated in part by giving unto *Ceasar*, that which belonged to *Ceasar*; and unto God that which belonged to God, as clearly stated in Holy Scripture.

Our founders and early leaders were defenders of religious freedom, and of the **separation of church and state,** which included Roger Williams, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and numerous others. We know how this turned out.

In a very short time with God's blessings, and under the **separation of Church and State**, America grew to become the most powerful, and most economically successful country on the face of the Earth. European and other countries from where our founders fled, where *Church-State* was a way of life, diminished, and have not experienced the blessings that our nation under God -with **separation of Church and State** - has experienced. God has blessed our Country in abundance, a light to the world. In contrast, the majority of Church-State countries have diminished significantly, becoming significantly weaker, less influential and substantially less prosperous.

We MUST maintain the traditional religious liberty principles (including the separation of Church and State) that our country was founded upon - the primary reason our forefathers fled the old "Church-State countries" and came to America.

Concerns:

- **The most critical problem by far is the Commission's effort to weaken and degrade the traditional protective WALL between Church and State, and replace it with a "BRIDGE."**

  The WALL needs to be reinforced and made stronger, to PROTECT religious, faith-based entities from being "influenced," manipulated, bullied or even persecuted by secular, non-religious entities. Thus, a WALL is needed, rather than a religious-secular, Church-State BRIDGE.

  The WALL needs restoring, not replacing with BRIDGE.

- **Balanced representation is crucial:**
  The commission was formed by serious people, but primarily from only one side of the major issue at hand; rather than a cross-section of representatives that should include such groups as *Americans United for Separation of Church and State*, and various others, including main-line Protestant and Jewish groups.

- **The Johnson Amendment needs to be fully enforced.**

We look forward to a fair and balanced representation and input regarding these all-important matters.

Sincerely,

Robert D. Sibley, Jr., MD

Santa Monica, California

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment, regarding Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 04:11:12 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: July_2026,_RDS_Response_to_the_Presidential_Commission_on_Religious_Liberty.docx

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Public Comment, regarding Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

Attached below

To: **The U.S. Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, July 12, 2026**

At: [redacted]

Regarding Public Comment on: SEPARATION OF CHURCH and STATE

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

It is note-worthy, that the commission is comprised of a number of respected and recognized members. Thank you for the work you have put into this project so far. However, there are serious issues that remain.

Introduction:

There are many aspects that the Commission appears to rightly conclude. However, it's evident that other aspects cry out for a balanced *representation* and *input*. Further serious re-evaluation and re-consideration is very much required in some areas. The **Wall** between Church and State that protects religious freedom from undue secular influence, should reinforced and strengthened - not allowed to be degraded, broken down and replaced by a **Bridge** between the secular and religious. The latter would result in disaster, as evidenced by history.

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As Christians, they came to America, where freedom-of-conscience to worship God - free of secular governments-of-men trying to manipulate or legislate spirituality - how they should worship and relate to God. Here in America, they could freely live the spiritually-based convictions they cherished, made possible under the of **Separation of Church and State**; demonstrated in part by giving unto *Ceasar*, that which belonged to *Ceasar*; and unto God that which belonged to God, as clearly stated in Holy Scripture.

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  The commission was formed by serious people, but primarily from only one side of the major issue at hand; rather than a cross-section of representatives that should include such groups as *Americans United for Separation of Church and State*, and various others, including main-line Protestant and Jewish groups.

- **The Johnson Amendment needs to be fully enforced.**

We look forward to a fair and balanced representation and input regarding these all-important matters.

Sincerely,

Robert D. Sibley, Jr., MD

Santa Monica, California

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendations for the Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 04:21:24 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear United States Department of Justice,

The one distinguishing feature that has set our glorious country apart from every nation on earth is liberty of conscience. This liberty has been hard fought for and hard won over the centuries. While some, and sometimes the majority, abuse this freedom, it is the bedrock upon which our national prosperity and identity stands or will fall.

The Pilgrim Fathers wanted religious liberty to worship according to the dictates of their own consciences differently than the state ordered and sanctioned Church of England or Catholic Church (depending on and changing by the will of the current ruler of that country). But when they found that liberty for themselves, they were unwilling to extend that same fought-for and sacrificed-for right to those whose consciences dictated a different form of religion—even those whose differences were derived from differences of understanding of the very Bible which the puritans held as their guide. And the result of prescribing religion by state power was the same for the puritans that it has ever been throughout history—persecution.

A man named Roger Williams founded Rhode Island on a different principle—that of separation of church and state. This principle maintained that the consciences of all people must be free to choose their own religious principles independently from motivation by state backing. Eventually this principle was adopted by the entire Union of the United States, and it is this one decisive liberty that sets this great country apart from all others.

Look at the history of any other country and you will find history of forced religion, that is religion being backed by the arms of the state. In every case, you will find that the result is persecution. The religion may be Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, or any other religion, but state sanctioned or supported religion always leads to persecution.

In our own dear country, we have been suffering under a movement that would attempt to make freedom of conscience and religious liberty essentially obsolete by making Christianity the only religion that is not allowable. This also is an encroachment on liberty of conscience, but the solution is not state-backed religion.

I would like to point out that if what we believe and teach is right, it will be self-evident and will not need the power of the state to force others into conformity.

Please defend religious liberty by all fair means, particularly by undoing those sanctions against Christ-centered religion and spirituality that has been pushed for so long under liberal-sounding guises of charity to all except those who follow the Bible. But please do not unify church and state as this will inevitably corrupt the church, drawing to it those whose love for power will lead them to become law-abiding hypocrites, and will inevitably and eventually lead to persecution of those who do not conform in every particular to the views of religion which are held and promoted by those in power.

Please keep the practice of religion and individual conscience a sacred right, untrammeled by the support or regulation of the State.

I respectfully request that the Department of Justice not adopt recommendations number 1 and 9 of the Committee and it instead adopt the part of recommendation 1 for a public hearing with written and oral submissions to more extensively study the history of separation of Church and State in the world and American history more specifically.

Very sincerely,

Hannah Rasmussen

From: THOMAS FOUST <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Keep the separation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 04:35:37 -0400
Importance: Normal

Good day and thank you for reading my email. History has shown that when church and state are combined, human atrocities occur. Iran is the perfect example of recent atrocities, the killing of 50,000 protesters, that result from a religious state.

The dark ages was when the Roman Catholic Church ran Rome starting in 1377. The church was known for having persecuting and killing 10s of thousands Christians and excommunicating Kings, and thankfully lost its political power in 1870.

The Johnson amendment to the tax code prohibits all 501(3)(c)s from endorsing or opposing any political candidates.

Our founding forefathers built this nation to have religious liberty. For men to worship as their conscience dictates without any restrictions from the government and without any persecution. If our government was to embrace religion and force all Americans to fall in line, then which religion does it force upon a free man. While not allowing Sharia law is a must, allowing a Muslim to worship their god is an American right and should remain.

Please, apply less government control and more liberty for all Americans. Religious liberty means government protects us to have the right to freely worship, not demand that we worship in order to assist with moral character. Moral character is a Parent responsibility not the government. Laws are to protect us from those without solid moral character.

Should you have any questions, please call me at [redacted]

Thank you,

Tom Foust
[redacted]
"Give me liberty or give me death. " Patrick Henry

Sent via the Samsung Galaxy S24 Ultra, an AT&T 5G smartphone
Get Outlook for Android

From: reuzlie labutoy <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT: Opposition to the Religious Liberty Commission Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 04:46:53 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the United States Department of Justice,

I am writing to formally submit my public comment opposing the report issued by the Religious Liberty Commission. I strongly object to any recommendations or measures in this report that threaten to weaken the constitutional separation of church and state.True religious liberty relies on the principle that the government must remain neutral and not favor, endorse, or integrate with any religious institution. Merging religious agendas with state functions compromises freedom of conscience and undermines the rights of religious minorities and believers alike.I urge the USDOJ to uphold the strict protections of the First Amendment and ensure that public institutions remain independent of sectarian influence.

Thank you for considering this objection.

Respectfully submitted,

Reuzlie Cabanillas LABUTOY

From: Dave Ruf <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENTe- Separation of Church and State – David Ruf
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 05:03:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am against removing "Separation of church and state". Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State are "two peas in a pod", Religious Liberty is secured and insured by Separation of Church and State.

While it is true that it is not printed in the Constitution, the presentation that it is not "in" there is clearly misleading. It is clear from many of the founders' writings... not the least of which being Thomas Jefferson as well the First Amendment that the principle absolutely is there.

But the million dollar question is "What" does Separation of Church and State mean? Now I have not had time to read your full written report, but I did see your presentation to President Trump. You made the claim that testimony after testimony that you investigated, it all came down to that phrase. People were vilified, persecuted, and assaulted because of the line "Wall of Separation between Church and State". This is where your error lies!

It was not "BECAUSE" of that phrase, but rather, the phrase was ABUSED by a set "Religious Mindset" that being atheistic far left liberalism. That in itself is a "belief system" that purposely MISUSED the phrase to do exactly what the phrase says not to do, that being making a "rule" (law) against Religious beliefs (Christianity, etc.) that Left Liberalism, socialism and communism doesn't like. A Leftist leaning CHURCH view point, controlling the STATE to enforce its beliefs. All these testimonies that were mentioned are PROOF that we NEED more than ever the Phrase Separation of Church and State!

To me the definition seems simple enough: "Separation of Church and State" means ... The CHURCH doesn't dictate to the STATE the areas God has given the STATE domain over (Give unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's) And the STATE doesn't try to dictate or favor a specific CHURCH(es) beliefs. Religious Liberty is Liberty of Conscience. Being a Christian myself, I see the whole of all "Self-evident Truths" is summed up in the Biblical 10 Commandments. The 1st 4 (No other Gods, No graven images, Take not His name in vain, Keep His Sabbath) the STATE dare not legislate for this is the domain of Freedom of Conscience. The last 6 commandments (Honor parents, No Murder, No Adultery, No stealing, No bare false witness(Court), No coveting) this God has given and holds accountable the STATE the domain of to care for its citizens.

Again what is Separation of Church and State? This AI says it quite succinctly: "The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution expressly states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This establishes two vital protections: the Establishment Clause (no officially mandated state religion) and the Free Exercise Clause (freedom to practice your faith as conscience dictates)."

To get a clearer picture of how these principles operate, it helps to break down both religion clauses and how they work in practice: The Free Exercise Clause: Prevents the government from interfering with, harassing or punishing your religious beliefs or practices, be that John Doe citizen or the President of the United States himself. The Establishment Clause: Prohibits the government from establishing a specific national religion (eg. Catholicism, Baptist, Lutheran, ... Judaism), or coercing or mandating religious participation. This means the government cannot show favoritism toward any specific religion OR non-religion over religion..." That is what most of those cases that the Religious Liberty Commission referred to, they were in-fact violations of the great clause "Separation between Church and State by a LIBERAL RELIGION forcing its anti-Christian views. It will be just as wrong if a Conservative group RELIGIOUSLY forces its views.

To me the so called Left, hijacked the phrase and your Commission has made a great error in accepting the Left's errant use of the term to mean no Christian belief or influence. Please don't throw the baby out with the bath water. The bath-water is the Left's misuse of the phrase, the blessed Baby is the principle of Separation of Church and State, of Religious Liberty

and Freedom of Conscience!

Patriotism runs deep in my family tree. From the Bragg brothers (Fort Bragg/Civil War Generals North & South), to relation to Martha Washington's family whereby by marriage to George Washington and Patrick Henry, to direct descendant of Lighthorse Henry Lee (signer of Dec. of Independence) and Great-great ... 'Uncle' Richard Lee (also signer of and in fact based on one of the great spotlight videos released by the White House was the one who made the motion in the 2nd Continental Congress that culminated in the document Declaration of Independence), ... and a direct descendant of a drummer boy and later a solder in the Revolutionary War named Consider White who is reputed to be a descendant of Peregrine White, the first child born in America on the Mayflower. I urge the Religious Liberty Commission to not throw out a great principle that serves as a protection for Religious Liberty and Freedom of Conscience just because it was misused and violated by the 'Religious' anti-religion Left.

Thank you for considering my thoughts... Always with Christ.

P.S. My brother thinks that if I do not send in a separate comment myself, you all will not count it. But I hope that you truly are reading each communique and thus count in the fact that I agree 100% with him, thus making that TWO voices appealing to you all. Thank you, and thank you to President Trump for making liberty of conscience a stalwart pillar in his administration.

From: Tom Hansen <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] THE DRAFT REPORT of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 05:18:13 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Committee,

Religious liberty is among the most precious gifts entrusted to humanity. It protects not only the beliefs of the majority, but also the conscience of the minority. True religious freedom is tested, not by how we treat those who agree with us, but by how we treat those whose religious convictions differ from our own.

History repeatedly demonstrates the dangers that arise when church and civil power become united. In the centuries following the conversion of Emperor Constantine, Christianity moved from being a persecuted faith to, in many places, becoming a persecuting power. Those who differed from established religious authority often faced fines, imprisonment, exile, or death.

During the medieval period, dissenting groups such as the Waldenses suffered severe oppression because they practiced their faith differently from the religious majority. The Inquisition stands as a solemn reminder of the tragic consequences that can occur when the state is used to enforce religious conformity.

Even many of the Reformers, despite recovering great biblical truths, at times failed to fully uphold liberty of conscience. The execution of dissenters and the persecution of minority religious groups in Protestant lands demonstrate that sincere Christians can still repeat the errors of the past when they seek civil support for religious objectives.

These historical lessons profoundly influenced the framers of the United States Constitution. Having witnessed the bloodshed and oppression produced by state-established religion in Europe, they sought to erect a wall of separation between church and state—not to weaken religion, but to protect both religion and government from corrupting one another.

The First Amendment recognizes that genuine faith cannot be compelled. Religion loses its moral power when supported by civil coercion. Conscience belongs ultimately to God, and every individual must be free to worship according to conviction, so long as the rights of others are not violated.

Therefore, I respectfully urge this committee to continue defending liberty of conscience for all people, including those whose religious practices may differ from the majority position. Let us be careful not to repeat the mistakes of history by using social pressure, institutional influence, or civil power to marginalize conscientious minorities.

A commitment to religious liberty requires us to protect the freedom of others even when we disagree with their conclusions. Such protection is not a concession to error but a recognition of the sacred dignity of conscience itself.

May we remember that religious liberty is easily lost but difficult to recover. The preservation of the separation of church and state remains one of the great safeguards of both civil freedom and genuine religion. Let us therefore defend these principles faithfully and impartially, so that future generations may continue to enjoy the blessings of freedom of conscience under God.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Q. Hansen

Joes, Colorado

From: Tom Hansen <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT– Separation of Church and State –Tom Q Hansen
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 05:24:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Committee,

Religious liberty is among the most precious gifts entrusted to humanity. It protects not only the beliefs of the majority, but also the conscience of the minority. True religious freedom is tested, not by how we treat those who agree with us, but by how we treat those whose religious convictions differ from our own.

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Respectfully submitted,

Tom Q. Hansen

Joes, Colorado

From: Jean Robert Kabera <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: Public Comment: In Support of the Separation of Church and State - Jean Robert Kabera
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 05:25:53 -0400
Importance: Normal

To: The Presidential Commission for Religious Liberty

Dear Member of the Commission on Religious Liberty,

I am writing to formally submit my comments regarding the Presidential Commission for Religious Liberty's draft report, which suggests that the separation of church and state is un-American and unconstitutional. As both a person of deep faith and an immigrant to this beautiful nation, I strongly urge the Commission to reconsider this stance. True religious liberty cannot exist without a clear boundary between the institutions of God and the institutions of government.

I offer my perspective based on scripture, constitutional history, and the tragic lived reality of what happens when this boundary is erased.

1. The Biblical Foundation for Separation

From a theological standpoint, the separation of the two spheres is deeply biblical. Jesus Himself drew a clear line between the authority of the state and the authority of God when He stated, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). Scripture consistently teaches that true faith cannot be coerced by the sword of the state; it must be a free choice of the human heart.

2. The Vision of the American Founders

The founders of this country understood this scriptural truth. When they established the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, the spirit of the Constitution was designed to protect the church from government overreach, and vice versa. Early American thinkers, drawing heavily from these principles, recognized that when a government attempts to legislate faith, it corrupts the purity of the gospel and compromises the integrity of the state.

3. A Warning from Personal Experience

My convictions are not just theoretical; they are shaped by where I come from. I immigrated from a nation where the government deeply interferes in the affairs of the church.

The Tragedy of State-Controlled Faith: We saw the ultimate failure of this overlap during the horrific 1994 genocide, where the political manipulation of religious institutions deeply tainted the church.

The Weaponization of Leadership: To this day in my home country, the government actively intervenes to appoint faith leaders who are favorable to the political agenda of those in power.

The Distortion of Doctrine: This political agenda rarely aligns with the true doctrines of the church. Instead, it forces religious bodies to become mouthpieces for state propaganda rather than sanctuaries for truth and spiritual growth.

Conclusion

I came to the United States because it has long stood as a beacon of true liberty—a place where the government cannot dictate how a person worships, nor control the leaders of their congregations. When the state and the church merge, the church is invariably corrupted by the pursuit of political power, and the state loses its moral compass.

For the sake of both the preservation of our constitutional republic and the purity of faith, I urge the Commission to uphold the vital wall of separation between church and state.

Sincerely,

Jean Robert Kabera

Redlands/California

From: Democracy Reads <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Full Commission Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 05:26:48 -0400
Importance: Normal

Hello,

I am deeply concerned by the Religious Liberty Commission's draft report. I read the full document, and although the Commission claims to champion religious liberty and American religious pluralism, the document is clearly focused on protecting - and integrating into government - the beliefs and practices of conservative Christians.

The advising board members and the witnesses featured in the report are overwhelmingly Christian or Jewish. The number of stories featuring those of other faiths was, by my count, only three. In fact, the report only mentions the existence of Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. Indigenous religions within the United States or any other world religions are not mentioned at all. And the possibility of protecting the non-religious from religious coercion is barely mentioned in the 224 page document. In addition, Sameerah Munshi, a Muslimn women who resigned from the Commission made comments stating that "members of the commission mocked her faith and treated her community with hostility." That is clearly not support or celebration of pluralism.

My greatest fear is the argument to re-interpret the Establishment Clause, as illustrated by this quote from the report, "The concept of a 'wall of separation between church and state' can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another and must remain completely separate. In reality, however, church and state strengthen and support one another." Separation of church and state is vital to protect religious believers and practitioners from diverse faiths, but also the non-religious from having beliefs and practices forced on them.

Please, protect actual religious liberty and diversity of thought, belief and practice in America.

Best,
A Deeply Concerned Citizen

Sent with Proton Mail secure email.

From: Patricia McDaniel <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 05:27:58 -0400
Importance: Normal
Inline-Images: Signature,_Patricia_M_McDaniel_Crop25%.jpg

July 12, 2026

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a very conservative Christian, I have read **Pillar of Freedoms** response to you regarding The Religious Liberty Commission's Draft Recommendations. I agree with it completely. Please read it carefully and implement it.

Thank you for your attention to this issue

In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,

Patricia M McDaniel
Santa Barbara, CA [redacted]

From: Michael Huffman <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 05:29:03 -0400
Importance: Normal

One of the reasons why these United States have lasted as long as they have is because they have had separation of church and state. Bridging this Gap will end the United States As We Know it. Anyone who has studied history should know this. We the People do not want the government involved with our religion, our faith, our choices in how we worship. My name is Michael Huffman of Trenton Missouri and my opinion has been stated. Do not infringe on religious liberty. For the sake of this country and my faith.

Michael Huffman
[redacted]

From: Tom Cho <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 05:33:12 -0400
Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern:
Please consider cancelling the proposition to remove the Separation of Church and State.
I adamantly oppose this proposition. This move by our government will inevitably start in motion events which will lead to religious persecution as stated in Revelation 13. Ultimately, it will lead to the demise of our nation.
Leaders of our nation will be signing the death sentence of our nation by pushing this proposition.
Please carefully consider this request.
Thank you,
Tom Cho

From: Laura <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State- Laura Mancia
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 05:43:03 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

It is concerning to me that the Commission is wanting to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a “bridge.” This is exactly opposite of how it should be as America was built on freedom where every man and woman has the opportunity to choose to be religious or not and where churches have freedom and are not influenced or pressured by the government.

This “bridge” concept is alarming in the fact that it will allow the government to have a hand in dictating the peoples and churches choices. The wall of separation of church and state was not built by the nonreligious people to keep religion suppressed. It was built by Bible believers to keep the church free. History is quite clear as to what happens when the government becomes involved in the church and it isn’t good for either one.

Please don’t build that bridge. Keep the wall of separation between church and state to protect the church and individual choice. Please let freedom continue to ring in America.

Sincerely,

Laura Mancia

From: Silas Perrin <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Silas Perrin
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 05:51:57 -0400
Importance: Normal

Do not unite church and state, do not repeal the Johnson amendment, The religious liberty of my country and ultimately the world depends upon it.

Thank you,

Silas Perrin
Pullman, Michigan

From: Phil Mills <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment: Objections to Recommendations 1 and 9 of the Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 06:07:20 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Department of Justice:

Thank you for receiving public feedback on the Religious Liberty Commission's recommendations of June 26, 2026. While we support portions of the Commission's work, we write to register our objection to Recommendations 1 and 9.

Our first concern involves the proposed DOJ guidance on the Establishment Clause. At the public release of the recommendations, Commission Chair Dan Patrick asserted that the separation of church and state has no basis in the Constitution. This claim is contradicted by the very men who framed the First Amendment. James Madison, its principal author, wrote plainly that the separation between religion and government is "strongly guarded" in the Constitution, and Thomas Jefferson affirmed that the American people, through the First Amendment, had built a wall of separation between church and state. Any guidance shaped by the Chair's mistaken premise would rest on an improper, not a proper, understanding of the Establishment Clause.

History explains why the Founders erected that wall. Church-state unions—not atheism—imprisoned William Penn, banished Roger Williams, publicly whipped Obadiah Holmes, executed William Tyndale for translating the Bible into English, silenced Galileo, Milton, and many others through censorship, and burned Michael Servetus in Calvin's Geneva. Free speech and a free press flourished in America largely because church and state were kept distinct. Madison warned that citizens must "take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties," and we take that warning seriously.

Second, we object to repealing the Johnson Amendment. Christ Himself distinguished what belongs to Caesar from what belongs to God. Removing this safeguard would invite churches to trade endorsements and congregational resources for political favors, corrupting both religion and government. Madison observed that religion in America has thrived precisely because of its total separation from the state.

We therefore respectfully ask that the Department decline to adopt Recommendations 1 and 9, and instead convene public hearings, with written and oral submissions, to study the history and meaning of church-state separation more thoroughly. We would gladly support and participate in such a study.

Respectfully submitted,
Phil Mills, MD

From: Ryan Dade <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] No "building bridges"
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 06:09:07 -0400
Importance: Normal

You may find it strange for a Christian to be against separation of church and state but I AM in favor of that. The lesson to learn is that our forefathers left Europe because they were not of the state religion and were discriminated against because of that. I don't want to see one religion or denomination prioritized to the detriment of others.

Eliminating the Johnson Amendment is NOT a good idea for two reasons: the pulpit is for preaching God's word, not endorsing candidates and it keeps the temptation from churches accepting money from political entities.

Keep separation of church and state.

From: e"[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment. separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 06:14:27 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am greatly concerned by the recommendations in your report. Many of our forefathers came to this country to be able to practice freedom of religion that was not allowed by their governments. The recommendations would weaken separation of church and state. Especially repealing the Johnson amendment and using government money to fund religious activities/ churches and religious schools. This can lead to interference and influence by politicians as these institutions become dependent on these monies. Separation of church and state keeps both stronger . Please reconsider The bridging of church and state. Let's keep these separate to protect both.

Sincerely,
Cynthia Hayes
Maitland Fl

Sent from my iPhone

From: Daniel Oliphant <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment Regarding the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 06:28:12 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

I am submitting these comments in response to the Commission's draft report concerning religious liberty and the relationship between church and state.

The report addresses questions of vast constitutional importance, particularly the way in which the federal government should respond to concerns involving religious discrimination while simultaneously remaining faithful to the limitations placed upon the government by the First Amendment.

I firmly agree with the Commission's acknowledgement that religious individuals and institutions have, in many instances during the past ten years especially, experienced unequal treatment as a result of their sincerely-held religious beliefs. A government that is committed to the principle of religious liberty should absolutely offer protections for the free exercise of religion, including for communities whose beliefs may differ from the prevailing social or political orthodoxy.

At the same time, the protection of religious liberty has historically depended upon maintaining a distinction between the authority of the civil governing power and the authority of religion. **The First Amendment addresses both concerns: it prevents government from prohibiting the free exercise of religion, while also preventing government from assuming a role in establishing or directing religious affairs**.

The separation of church and state, rightly understood, is not hostile toward religion, and does not constitute an attempt to remove religious language from public life. Rather, it reflects a recognition that matters of faith and conscience require a degree of independence from civil authority. The government is well suited to protect the rights of its citizens, **but it is not well suited to determine religious obligations or to employ legal authority in matters that belong to individual conscience.**

This understanding in America has developed from historical experience. The long association between ecclesiastical and civil authority in Europe demonstrated the difficulties that arise when the institutions of religion and government become entwined. The relationship between the Church and civil authorities over the course of many centuries in Europe created an environment in which religious dissent and minority convictions became subject to legal penalties vulnerable to the power of the state.

The American constitutional framework, by contrast, has historically embodied a different approach: Rather than establishing a particular religious order, or placing religion under governmental supervision, **the First Amendment created conditions in which religious communities could exist independently and participate in public life without reliance upon state authority.** This arrangement has allowed a diverse range of religious faith traditions to coexist, while simultaneously preserving the freedom of individuals whose beliefs have differed from those of the majority.

Seventh-day Adventists have historically maintained that religious observance is properly a matter of individual conscience, rather than a civil requirement. We believe that the prophecies of the books of Daniel and Revelation point toward a future conflict involving religious liberty and legislation concerning federally-mandated Sunday observance. While this belief arises from our theology, our underlying concern is consistent with the broader

constitutional principle that government should not by any means compel religious practice or prescribe obligations in the realm of religious worship.

It is this reason that I submit to you **that federal measures intended to address religious discrimination in this country should be drafted within the framework of the First Amendment**, rather than in the context of an expansion of governmental authority over religious questions. The state has an extremely important role in protecting the sincerely-held religious beliefs of its citizens, but not to the detriment of its responsibility to protect religious minorities.

The experience of the United States historically has revealed that religion and government are both better served when their respective spheres remain distinct. The constitutional separation between church and state has not prevented religious participation in public life; it has provided the conditions under which religious communities of differing beliefs have been able to participate freely and equally in civil society.

I would respectfully encourage the Commission to preserve this constitutional balance by reaffirming the complementary protections of the Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses, and by recognizing that the protection of religious liberty depends not only upon safeguarding religious activity from governmental interference, but also upon maintaining appropriate limits upon governmental involvement in religion.

Respectfully,

Daniel Oliphant
Sterling, VA

From: Charlyne Barber <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Pillar of Freedom
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 06:29:28 -0400
Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.

Charlene Barber

From: Fran Gourdet <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State - Frances Gourdet
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 06:31:49 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I write to strongly oppose your current draft proposal, as it represents a clear departure from the spirit and intent of the First Amendment. While the exact phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the Constitution, its principle is woven throughout. The founders deliberately created a system that keeps government from entangling itself in religion and protects every individual's freedom of conscience.

These protections were born out of experience. The forefathers of this nation knew firsthand the destructive effects of religious persecution and state control of belief. Wherever governments have tried to manage or suppress faith, both the people and the nation have ultimately been weakened, not strengthened, as history repeatedly shows in societies marked by heavy religious repression and conflict. They set a different course here: a country where belief is neither compelled nor punished by the state.pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih+2

Your current proposal moves us away from that course. Any step that increases government involvement in religion, even for seemingly noble reasons, undermines the very liberty it claims to support. Faith cannot be made more genuine by funding, policy, or coercion; it must remain the free response of free people.

Let this nation continue to be a land of courage rather than fear, where we refuse to trade away liberty for the illusion of safety or control. The strength of the United States has always rested on our willingness to protect freedom, especially when doing so is difficult or unpopular.

I urge you to withdraw this proposal and to uphold the principles that have preserved religious liberty and civil peace in this country from its beginning.

Warmest regards,

Fran Gourdet
Lifestyle Coach, Educator, ARP Facilitator, and Bible Instructor

"Disease is an effort of nature to free the system from conditions that result from a violation of the laws of health. In case of sickness, the cause should be ascertained. Unhealthful conditions should be changed, wrong habits corrected. Then nature is to be assisted in her effort to expel impurities and to re-establish right conditions in the system." -- The Ministry of Healing, by Ellen G. White

« Maladi se yon efò lanati pou libere kò a anba kondisyon ki soti nan vyolasyon lwa sante yo. Lè yon moun malad, li enpòtan pou chèche konnen kòz la. Fòk yo chanje move kondisyon ki pa bon pou sante, epi korije move abitid yo. Lè sa a, lanati dwe jwenn asistans pou ede li retire tout enpurte epi reetabli bon kondisyon nan kò a. » -- Ministè Gerison, pa Ellen G. White

PII

PII

From: Gabriel Taylor <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State - Gabriel Taylor
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 06:36:13 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I write as a Christian who deeply values religious liberty and freedom of conscience. I appreciate the Commission's desire to protect Americans from discrimination because of their faith. Every person should be free to worship God—or not—without coercion or government interference.

However, I am concerned that several recommendations in the draft report could unintentionally weaken one of America's greatest safeguards for religious liberty: a clear distinction between the institutions of church and state.

Recommendation #1 urges the Department of Justice to redefine the understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state. While this principle is often misunderstood, it has long served as a protection for both religion and government. It keeps government from controlling the church and prevents churches from seeking governmental power. Weakening that distinction risks future conflicts that history has repeatedly shown can threaten liberty of conscience.

Recommendations #4, #6, and #8 would create new federal reporting systems, task forces, and litigation priorities centered on religious liberty. While protecting constitutional rights is important, expanding permanent federal structures devoted to religious matters deserves careful scrutiny. Government authority created for one administration may later be exercised very differently by another. History reminds us that powers established with good intentions can later be used in ways never originally envisioned.

I am especially concerned by Recommendation #9 to repeal the Johnson Amendment. Churches should remain free to proclaim biblical truth without becoming partisan political organizations. If churches are permitted to officially endorse candidates while maintaining tax-exempt status, the line between the pulpit and the campaign platform becomes increasingly blurred. The mission of the church is to proclaim Christ, not to function as an arm of any political movement.

America has been blessed because government has generally protected the free exercise of religion without becoming the patron or promoter of religion itself. Religious liberty flourishes best when government protects everyone's rights equally while refraining from entanglement with religious institutions.

True religious liberty means protecting the conscience of every American—Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, atheist, and every other citizen alike. Government should neither hinder nor favor religion, but preserve equal liberty under the law.

I respectfully urge the Commission to reconsider recommendations that would diminish the practical separation between church and state, expand governmental involvement in religious affairs, or encourage closer institutional ties between churches and partisan politics. The strongest protection for religious liberty is not a closer union of religion and government, but a principled commitment to preserving both institutions within their proper constitutional spheres.

Thank you for considering these comments.

This comment is based on my conviction that protecting liberty of conscience requires preserving both the free exercise of religion and the constitutional safeguards that prevent government from becoming entangled with religion.

Respectfully,

--
Gabriel Taylor

From: michael doucoumes <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendations of RLC re: Separation of Church & State & the U.S. Constitution
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 06:41:03 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission:

Please help preserve true freedom of religion in this country. We need to adhere to the historic principle of separation of church and state. We need to always adhere to the establishment clause in the first amendment and NEVER allow any law to be passed regarding religion. We can in no way favor one form of religion over another. We need to never enact a law that would open the door to persecution of anyone, based on their religious belief.

I understand there are those who believe that separation of church and state is not in the constitution. Though the words "separation of church and state" do not appear in the constitution, the establishment clause in the first amendment makes it abundantly clear that this is the intent of the constitution. If no law can be established regarding religion, this is the end of the story - there WILL BE separation of church and state in the U.S. Therefore, I have to respectfully but vehemently disagree with Dan Patrick and Ben Carson's recent statements that the separation of church is not in the constitution. These are very unfortunate statements which I hope and pray that they will someday soon realize and apologize for.

We have the statement of former President James Madison, who is the principal author of the establishment clause, that "strongly guarded as is the
separation between Religion and Government 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." We all know the persecutions that took place in our country against quakers, Jews, etc. But much worse is the persecution that took place in Europe for over 1000 years in which TENS OF MILLIONS of Christians such as the Waldensians and Huguenots and many others, were martyred by the Roman Papacy. Let us NEVER FORGET the Massacre of St. Bartholomew in which 5,000 - 30,000 Huguenots lost their lives in just a few weeks! Let us NEVER FORGET how William Tyndale was martyred for TRANSLATING THE BIBLE. William Tyndale, of all people, a martyr. Imagine it! Let it soak in. This is what can happen when laws are allowed that violate freedom of conscience. Aren't you glad Tyndale, motivated strongly by the Holy Spirit, persisted in spite of those who tried to control his conscience and stop him from translating and publishing the Bible far and wide? I ask you, where would we be today without him? Where would we be today without the Bible in our hands! We Christians owe him immense adoration and respect, Instead, what "Christians" gave him was execution. This is the sure result when the church and government work together to favor the interests of one religion over others.

I plead with you to PLEASE not open this door by doing away with the establishment clause of our constitution and allowing ANY kind of law to be passed in respect of religion. Let's remain a free country which allows the freedom of conscience that our God grants all of us. Let's recognize the fact that we can't legislate morality. People only come to salvation by the work of the Holy Spirit on their hearts, not by adhering to any kind of human law or enactment. Please do the work of the Lord today by backing away from any attempt to eliminate the separation of church and state in our country.

Thank you for your consideration of my thoughts.

Mike Doucoumes

From: vivianallen1798 <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State- Vivian Allen
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 06:42:16 -0400
Importance: Normal

Greetings, I am writing this letter as an American citizen who loves her country and wish to share my grievances with the cuurent finding of the Presidential Religious Liberty Committee. This Committee which is made up of Catholic minds say, everyone can worship God as they may choose, as long as it coincides with the common good. We hear this commission talk about constantly that the constitution does not guarantee the separation of church and state. Is this term in the constitution? No, it is not! However, it is in the First Amendment of the constitution. 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 petition the Government for redress of grievances. Right here in this statement is the establishment of the separation of church and state. Thomas Jefferson, who was the first individual to coin the term separation of church and state did this back in 1802. He was simply applying the first amendment because he knew that somewhere in the future that a committee would be formed to break this abridgement. Le's hold firm to our constitution and not repudiate it based on doctrines of man-made suppositions.

Sincerely,

Vivian Allen

Las Vegas NV

From: Teresa Sherard <[redacted]>
To: [redacted], Teresa Sherard <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTo-CHURCH AND STATE SEPARATION – TERESA SHERARD
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 06:47:17 -0400
Importance: Normal

The concept of the separation of church and state is built upon centuries of history and not a single letter from Thomas Jefferson to a Baptist congregation. For hundreds of years the countries of Europe experienced the manipulation of the government by the church during the Dark Ages. This eventually led persecuted religious faiths to seek refuge across thousands of miles of treacherous ocean to this land to find religious freedom. Yet even they were not experienced in giving the freedom which they themselves desired. Quakers, Jews, Catholics, indigenous religions and sometimes even the Puritans themselves were persecuted by the dominant religion in this new land in the 17th century.

Roger Williams, a visionary clergyman, founded the settlement of Providence in 1636 which would eventually become the colony of Rhode Island. Religious freedom had finally found a place to breathe. Persons with varying religious faiths were seen to flourish side by side without government interference and more importantly without religious interference. *"Along with other colonists, Williams built a community where religious beliefs and civil laws were clearly separated. In colonial Rhode Island, Anglicans, Puritans, Quakers, Catholics, Jews, atheists, and members of other faiths lived as neighbors with equal rights."* (1)

The prosperity of this colony both startled and inspired. *"Rhode Island heavily influenced other colonies primarily by pioneering the separation of church and state and pushing for aggressive colonial resistance. These radical ideas fundamentally shaped the ultimate structure of American governance*". (2) James Madison and Thomas Jefferson took note almost 150 years later in 1791 as the Bill of Rights was being forged. They used the concepts established by Rhode Island to write the First Amendment which states in part that *"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech".* (3) More than a century before they had had demonstration of guiding principles necessary to anchor securely the principles of civil and religious freedom into the nation through the Bill of Rights. They endeavored to form a nation in which the government and the church remained in separate spheres to perform the duties peculiar to each. This separation was necessary to prevent the overreach of government into the religious lives of its citizens and to prevent manipulation of the government by religion.

"In his 1644 treatise The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, Williams argued for a "wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world." Thomas Jefferson famously echoed this exact metaphor in his 1802 Letter to the Danbury Baptists, advocating against government interference in religious practice." (4) The concept was not created by Jefferson and it is erroneous to attribute these concepts to him solely.

The government must not assume the place of the Holy Spirit in the formation of the convictions of the heart. There must remain a wall, deep and wide and high that separates the mechanicians of the government from the movement of God upon the heart that human beings do not presume it upon themselves to dictate that which belongs to God alone.

1) https://www.nps.gov/people/roger-williams.htm
2) https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/founding-rhode-island

3) https://www.soundvision.com/article/constitutional-amendments-1-10-the-bill-of-rights?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=21720245654&gbraid=0AAAAA-Bv3vyOKTveDQwMVPZDBx3V5RSXO&gclid=CjwKCAjwmdLSBhANEiwAkREMN6JcNMuc-1gt23A-rxMPulCx2obSy6UXhuCXM6cv5oCDDZBnGrUYKxoCDnAQAvD_BwE#sthash.Sd6zdqVX.dpbs

4) https://people.smu.edu/religionandfoundingusa/thomas-jeffersons-danbury-letter/the-great-awakening-and-the-danbury-letter/

Sincerely,

Teresa Sherard

From: david evanso[redacted]
To: "RLC (OASG)" [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Seperation!!!
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 06:50:19 -0400
Importance: Normal

I cant believe this "dept. Of Religeous Freedom" can't understand the establishment clause and free exercise clause.

Separate gov and religion and you have the USA.

Join the two and we will go back to King George. Its that simple.

From: Joshua Norton <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State - Joshua Norton
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:01:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:
I'm writing as a citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state. Church and state should remain separate because in is grounds that all American freedoms are built.

From: Christy Lynn <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:07:41 -0400
Importance: Normal

I just wanted to write and ask that you guys please don't change any of the first amendment. I know that it can turn into something bad because history tends to repeat itself. Thank you for upholding what Thomas Jefferson has set in place. God bless! 😊🙏🙏

From: Sherry Mills <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Opposition to Religious Liberty Commission Recommendations 1 and 9
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:09:04 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Department of Justice:

Thank you for accepting public comments on the recommendations released by the Religious Liberty Commission on June 26, 2026. I am writing as a Christian and a private citizen to express my opposition to the first and ninth recommendations.

I was troubled to learn that the Commission's Chair announced, at the very release of these recommendations, that separation of church and state lacks any constitutional foundation. That is simply not what the Founders believed. James Madison, who drafted the First Amendment, described the separation of religion and government as strongly guarded within the Constitution itself, and Jefferson wrote that the First Amendment erected a wall between church and state. If the Department issues guidance on the Establishment Clause, that guidance should reflect the Founders' understanding, not the Chair's.

As a Christian, I also oppose repealing the Johnson Amendment. Our Lord taught us to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. When churches begin endorsing candidates and directing congregational money into politics, both the church and the government are degraded. Faith in America has flourished precisely because it has never depended on political power.

History bears this out. It was governments united with churches that whipped Baptists in colonial Massachusetts, drove Roger Williams into the wilderness, and put William Tyndale to death for giving us the English Bible. I do not want to see America take even the first step back toward that world.

Please decline to adopt Recommendations 1 and 9, and instead open this important question to full public hearings.

Sincerely,
Sheridan Ann Mills

From: Carol Elliotto <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Religious Liberty Commission – Carol Elliott
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:10:34 -0400
Importance: Normal

I disagree with the premise that the United States should favor Christianity or any other religion. Separation of church and state is a constitutional principle that explains how our religious liberty is protected by the First Amendment.

The Johnson Amendment protects houses of worship from partisan politicking and ensures fair play in our campaigns. Nullifying the Johnson Amendment provides yet another avenue for money to flow to political campaigns. My church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) adheres to the Johnson Amendment. I believe that's how it should be for all churches and religious institutions.

Public (taxpayer) funds should go to public schools, not private schools.

Public schools should not be pushing sectarian faith, like forcing the posting of the Ten Commandments or pushing official prayer. Religious liberty means no one should be forced to comply with the rules of any particular religion or faith.

Institutions receiving public funding should not be allowed to discriminate against individuals but instead should treat all people fairly and equally.

Carol Elliott
PII

From: Daniel Etson <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State - Daniel Etson
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:14:49 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Please reconsider repealing the Johnson Amendment. By destroying the wall that is the separation of the church and state and allowing religious activities to be funded by the government you will eroding, not strengthening religious liberty. Doing so would allow corrupt government entities to hold religious organizations hostage using financial support as leverage to further political purposes. This country was founded upon the very idea that no king or government could dictate how its people worship and the Johnson Act is an important safeguard of that idea. The church belongs to God and God alone and should be kept free from political influence.

Daniel Etson
Philadelphia, TN

From: Julie Brown <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:16:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

The Religious Liberty Commission, established by President Trump, weaponizes faith for political gain rather than protecting religious liberty for all. It overwhelmingly privileges one narrow view.

A commission meant to defend religious freedom should reflect America's diversity. Instead, it is dominated by Catholic and Protestant Christians, with only one seat for Orthodox Judaism and mere advisory input from Islam. Major world religions are entirely absent.

This imbalance violates the Federal Advisory Committee Act, which requires fair balance in viewpoints represented. More fundamentally, by empowering government to define religious liberty through a single "Judeo-Christian" lens, it makes the state the arbiter of religious truth, precisely what the First Amendment exists to prevent.

I reject this commission's formation and its recommendations. They stem from an unlawfully composed body, are discriminatory in effect, and represent a misuse of public power that no faith should endorse.

Regards,

Julie Brown

From: Maria Anthony <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:21:55 -0400
Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments.
Sincerely, Maria Anthony
Huntsville, Alabama

From: Dena Guthrie <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment Regarding the Religious Liberty Commission's
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:23:09 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Department of Justice:

I am writing to comment on the recommendations of the Religious Liberty Commission dated June 26, 2026, and specifically to ask the Department not to adopt Recommendations 1 and 9.

America's founders did not separate church and state out of hostility to faith. They did it because they had seen, in living memory, what happens when the two are joined. William Penn sat in English jails for his Quaker convictions before founding Pennsylvania as a refuge. Obadiah Holmes, an ancestor of Abraham Lincoln, was publicly whipped in Massachusetts for religious dissent. None of these men were persecuted by unbelievers; they were persecuted by fellow Christians wielding the power of the state. That is the evil the First Amendment was written to prevent.

So when the Commission's own Chair declares that the separation of church and state has no constitutional basis, I am concerned about what kind of "clarifying guidance" the Department is being asked to produce. Madison and Jefferson both stated in plain terms that the Constitution separates religion from government. Any official guidance should begin there.

I also ask the Department to leave the Johnson Amendment in place. Churches are sanctuaries, not campaign offices. Once congregational endorsements and dollars become currency in elections, politicians will court churches with promises and churches will court politicians with votes, and the spiritual mission of the church will be the first casualty.

Rather than issuing guidance shaped by a flawed premise, please hold open public hearings and invite written and oral testimony on the history of religious liberty in this country.

Thank you for your consideration,

Dena R. Guthrie
Hixson, TN

From: Ivan Tenorio <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to Religious Liberty Commission Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:27:47 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Religious%20Liberty.pdf.pdf

I fully disagree with the findings of the report specifically found in points #1 and #9 that tear down the wall of separation of church and state. For my full response please read the attached document.

Ivan Tenorio, Private Citizen of the great state of South Carolina

Dear Chair Patrick,

Vice Chair Dr. Carson,

and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write to you to express my disagreement and discontent of the recently released religious liberty commissions reports founding. Specifically I'd like to raise concern to Points 1 and 9 of the report that adjust the direction of religious

liberty in this nation so that it will arrive at a fateful destination where liberty is only granted to those who believe or obey the religious commandments of the majority. I write to request and reconsider that you

protect true religious liberty by rejecting and removing recommendations #1 and 9 from the report through the most direct process possible.

How easily we forget how this nation was created. It was created on the blood, sweat and tears of our founding fathers fleeing the old world. What comprised the old world persecution? By what and by who were those pilgrims persecuted by? It was none other than the powers that we speak of this day: state and religious powers, which was exercised by the Roman Catholic Church. And many people were martyred because of their conviction and their stand that these two entities should never mix in society. Because of that, they sought a better country, a better land to where these two entities would never marry once more.

We're told in that grand old document which our forefathers set forth as their bill of rights—the Declaration of Independence—they declared: "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." And the Constitution guarantees, in the most explicit terms, the inviolability of conscience: "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

"The framers of the Constitution recognized the eternal principle that man's relation with his God is above human legislation, and his rights of conscience inalienable. Reasoning was not necessary to establish this truth; we are conscious of it in our own bosoms. It is this consciousness which, in defiance of human laws, has sustained so many martyrs in tortures and flames. They felt that their duty to God was superior to human enactments, and that man could exercise no authority over their consciences. It is an inborn principle which nothing can

eradicate.”—Congressional documents (U.S.A.), serial No. 200, document No. 271. . GC 295.2-GC 295.3

But over the last few decades, we have seen that golf slowly merging together once more. The principles that founded this country are slowly disappearing right before our very eyes. When we see commission reports publish points that say the separation of church and state do not exist, that they should print 1 million bumper stickers that echo that point, once must truly ask themselves in which country they live in? Vatican City or the United States of America.

We’re told in a book called The Great Controversy: “Such action would be directly contrary to the principles of this government, to the genius of its free institutions, to the direct and solemn avowals of the Declaration of Independence, and to the Constitution. The founders of the nation wisely sought to guard against the employment of secular power on the part of the church, with its inevitable result—intolerance and persecution. The Constitution provides that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” and that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” Only in flagrant violation of these safeguards to the nation’s liberty, can any religious observance be enforced by civil authority.””

What makes this country creates is the ability for all private citizens to live and think how they desire while, of course following civil order. This great nation upon which I had the privilege to be raised has granted millions opportunities which they would never find elsewhere. If this commission reports findings are exercised and implemented in executive actions or in the courts of congress be sure that national ruin and religious persecution will be the sure result. I state again I request that you

protect true religious liberty by rejecting and removing recommendations #1 and 9 from the report through the most direct process possible.

Ivan Tenorio,

Private citizen of the great state of South Carolina

From: GEORGE GUTHRIEo <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: Public Comment Regarding the Religious Liberty Commission's Recommendations To the Department of Justice:
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:28:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

Sirs,

I appreciate the chance to comment on the Religious Liberty Commission's recommendations submitted to the President on June 26, 2026. While some of the recommendations have merit, I urge the Department to reject the first and the ninth.

On the proposed Establishment Clause guidance: the Commission Chair has stated publicly that church-state separation appears nowhere in the Constitution. The historical record says otherwise. Madison, the First Amendment's chief architect, expressly affirmed that the Constitution guards the separation between religion and government, and he warned Americans to be alarmed at the first encroachment on liberty rather than waiting until abuses harden into precedent. Guidance premised on the Chair's view would invert the meaning of the very clause it claims to clarify.

The Founders had good reasons for building this protection. Every generation before theirs had watched what unions of church and state produce: censorship of thinkers from Galileo to Milton, the execution of Servetus in Geneva, the persecution of Quakers and Baptists here in the colonies. Religious freedom, free speech, and freedom of the press stand or fall together, and all three depend on keeping civil power out of religious hands and religious power out of civil hands.

On the Johnson Amendment: eliminating it would convert pulpits into political machinery. Ministers seeking influence would deliver endorsements and money; officeholders would repay them with legislation. Both sides of that bargain would be corrupted by it. Madison observed that American religion grew stronger, not weaker, because of its complete independence from the state.

When the church dictates to the government what to do the church leaders lose their Christ like characteristics. Those seeking to be church leaders are doing so for power. It is human nature. Jesus stated, “My kingdom is not of this world.” This destroys both the church and the state.

I respectfully ask the Department to set aside Recommendations 1 and 9 and to convene public hearings where these questions can be examined in the light of history.

Respectfully,

George Guthrie, MD MPH CDCES
<PII>

From: Sandra JONES <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RELIGIOUS LIBERTY Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:29:27 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 13, 2026
Email: [redacted]

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the US Religious Liberty Commission:

These Religious Liberty thoughts & suggestions, will affect the whole EARTH including our COUNTRY & its FAMILIES within AUSTRALIA, being ALLIES of USA. Both, countries fairest, best & most FRUITFUL & PROSPEROUS DAYS have been received under the PROTECTION of these current BALANCED LAW SYSTEM Jonathan Amendments.

🔰RENDER to CAECAR the THINGS that BELONG to CAECAR & unto GOD, the THINGS that are GODS. MARK 12:17

IF CIVIL GOVERNMENTS use their GOD GIFTED CIVIL RIGHTS & CIVIL POWERS to CONTROL CIVIL CRIME & MAINTAIN CIVIL ORDER & OBEDIENCE to CONTROL CRIME IT IS their JUST RIGHT to DO that IN BEHALF of their CITIZENS as CIVILIANS.
BUT to LEGISLATE MONETIZED FUNDING & FORCE, legalistic WORSHIP & PRAYER which is the CHURCHES DUTY to GOD ALONE, is not WISE or FRUITFUL & ENDURING sound REASONING

"LIBERTY of CONSCIENCE" IS needed and should be promoted & protected & preserved faithfully by GOVERNANCE for ALL MEN.
"GOD" IS our SUNSHINE, WIND, RAIN LIFE, SOIL & DAILY REST GIFTER, our FOOD FRUIT & TREES, HERBS & RESOURCES GIFTER which DAILY "HE MAINTAINES for our LIFE and CARE" and can and should any GOVERNMENT BODY use MONETIZATION & CIVIL authority to MANAGE & FORCE PRAYER in SCHOOLS, and at the SAME TIME PROMOTE EVOLUTIONARY THEORIES that DENY GOD'S EXISTANCE? IT IS CONTARY to SOUND REASON. GOVERNANCE HISTORY TELLS US, that this PRACTICE, TENDS to be FAULTY & has NEVER STABILIZED thing's well, .. throughout EARTH'S HISTORY.

INVOLUNTARY LAWS are DAILY MAINTAINED by GOD for LIFE on the PLANET, very, STABILY, & CONSISTENY over CENTURIES for LIFE for ALL MEN. The LESS INTERFERENCE & INTRUSION UPON GOD'S NATURAL CARE ROLL, the more STABIL will society be. AMEN.

CHURCHES should NOT be FUNDED by GOVERNMENTS which can ONLY CORRUPT them FURTHER. TRUE, GENUINE LOVE & OBEDIENCE to GOD SHOULD BE the ONLY MOTIVATING FACTOR for the CHURCHES and NOT-for-Profit Ministries. The FEAR & REVERENCE for GOD'S IDEAL PLAN, WILL & WAYS is the ONLY GENUINE HEART MOTIVE needs of the CHURCH. .. CHURCHES much need the POWER of GOD & NOT the POLITICAL power of POLITICS & seducing FINANCIAL interest which TURNS their HEARTS & MINDS from TRUTH to fables.

MAY GOD BLESS, IS MY PRAYER ACCORDING to "HIS WILL & PLAN & PURPOSE for HUMANITY". A-MEN ☘️🙏🙏🙏☘️

Ms Sandra JONES
[redacted] AUSTRALIA [redacted]

From: Shirley Buck <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Freedom of Religion
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:30:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Committee of Religious Freedom,
Please, Please, Please, keep the separation of church and state in place! History shows us exactly what happens when this is compromised or removed and the results are disastrous!!! The lack of this separation is exactly why America was founded in the first place! People were being forced to believe or follow a certain religion and it went against their conscience and the Bible.
Please let people decide if and what they will choose to believe and do not have that connected with government!! Let's not make bridges or connections in any way between religion and government funding, or anything else that could eventually restrict our freedom to worship as each person is convicted to worship.
Keep the first amendment in place!!
No changes or revisions of any kind!!

Thank you for hearing and respecting the wishes of the American people!!

Respectfully,
Shirley Buck

Sent from my iPhone

From: Michelle <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Commetn—Muslim Enclave Sheridan, IL (Vairt)—Michelle Peterson
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:30:25 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Carson, and Members of the Commission:

I believe we need to begin having an honest conversation about the Islamization of America and the problems that arise when immigration is accompanied by resistance to assimilation and the formation of separate religious, cultural, economic, and social communities. This is not an argument against religious liberty, nor is it a claim that Muslims should be denied the constitutional rights afforded to every American. Muslims, like all Americans, have the right to live, worship, own property, and peacefully practice their faith.

But religious liberty does not require America to surrender its own identity, culture, or constitutional foundation. America was not founded as a collection of competing civilizations occupying the same territory. We are one nation, governed by one constitutional order, and our system of ordered liberty developed from a biblical moral foundation and rests upon principles including individual rights, equal justice under law, due process, representative government, and a common civic allegiance.

There is also a deeper spiritual conflict that cannot simply be ignored. The God identified in America's biblical tradition is the God of the Bible - the God Christians confess as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Islamic theology rejects central truths of that biblical revelation, including the divinity and Sonship of Jesus Christ and the Christian understanding of the nature of God. From a biblical Christian perspective, this is not merely a difference in customs or styles of worship; it is a fundamentally competing claim about who God is and whose authority is ultimate. When a religious worldview with its own comprehensive cultural and legal tradition becomes the organizing basis for increasingly separate communities, the conflict can move beyond private belief and begin affecting the shared civic order.

The problem, therefore, is not simply that Muslims are living in America. The problem arises when immigration contributes to the growth of communities organized around a religious, cultural, or legal worldview that discourages assimilation into the broader nation. Religious liberty protects worship and conscience, but it does not require Americans to accept the gradual development of parallel social or legal structures within our own country. No religious legal system—whether Sharia, canon law, or any other—may supersede the Constitution, state law, due process, equal protection, property rights, criminal law, or the civil rights of American citizens.

This broader national issue has now become a local issue for us in LaSalle County, Illinois. Our community is confronting the proposed redevelopment of the former Fox River Resort near Sheridan by Vairt / V Resort Living. Based on the promotional materials and information we have collected, the proposal has been presented as a large, gated, faith-centered planned community involving approximately 332 condo-style units, a mosque, a school, and the potential for a population numbering in the thousands. That is why many of us do not view this as simply another real-estate development.

The concern is not that Muslims may purchase homes in LaSalle County or worship here. They have the same constitutional rights as everyone else. The concern is the deliberate creation of a large, concentrated, faith-centered community that could become increasingly self-contained rather than naturally integrating into the existing community. The controversy surrounding the former Fox River Resort has also raised serious questions about land use, population density, infrastructure, traffic, transparency, investment structures, ownership, and the long-term character of our rural community.

What is happening in LaSalle County forces us to confront a larger national question: Are we still allowed to expect people who come to America to assimilate into America?

Assimilation does not require anyone to abandon every family tradition, ethnic heritage, or private religious belief. It does require a shared civic allegiance. People who come to America should be expected to become part of America - not to recreate separate societies within it that operate according to competing civilizational values. Our concern in LaSalle County is therefore about more than one property, one developer, or one proposed community. It is about the precedent we are establishing for the future.

I believe two reforms deserve serious consideration:

First, America should adopt meaningful constitutional allegiance screening for immigrants. This should not be a religious test, but a serious assessment of whether those seeking to enter this country genuinely accept the supremacy of the U.S. Constitution and American civil law, reject political violence and coercion, and do not seek to establish a competing legal or political order. Immigration policy should consider not only whether an applicant presents an immediate security threat, but whether that person is willing to join and remain loyal to the biblically based constitutional system of the nation he or she is entering.

Second, America should restore a serious national expectation of civic assimilation. Those seeking residency or citizenship should be expected to learn English, understand our constitutional system and history, participate in the broader American community, and recognize that American civil law is the governing legal authority. Religious freedom should remain fully protected, but residency and citizenship should be contingent on allegiance, participation, and integration into our nation's constitutional and civic order. "One Nation Under God" expresses a simple principle: America's strength depends upon unity under a common constitutional order - not the gradual formation of separate civilizational enclaves within it. We cannot preserve a nation if we are unwilling to define what that nation is, what its laws are based upon, and what those who come here are expected to join. What is happening in LaSalle County is one local example of a much larger national conversation that America can no longer afford to avoid.

I encourage you to review the evidence, background information, promotional materials, and documentation we have compiled at www.DefendLaSalle.com.

Religious freedom must be protected. So must America.

Respectfully,

Michelle Peterson

PII

PII

Sent from Proton Mail for iOS.

From: Sandy and Bob Kennedy <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment- Religious Liberty Sandy Kennedy
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:33:10 -0400
Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please Implement them.
I object to funding religious non-profit activities.
I object to repealing the Johnson Amendment, which restricts church's political activities.
I request that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced.

From: Brian Facey <[redacted]>
To: "RLC" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State - Brian Facey
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:37:01 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

As a U.S. citizen and a person of faith, I am writing to express my concern with your recent statements on the wall of separation of church and state being replaced with a "bridge". I am also concerned with further politicizing America's churches and using government money for non-profit religious activities. History shows that when religion becomes aligned with the state power, those in power have oppressed others.

Please don't build that bridge to separate church and state.

Sincerely,

Brian Facey

Sent using Zoho Mail

From: "C.B. Davenport" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – C B Davenport
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:38:21 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a private citizen, not on behalf of any organization, because I believe the Commission's work touches something more foundational than policy preference: it touches the question of where rights come from in the first place. If religious liberty exists only because a majority of Americans currently favor it, then it can be taken away the moment that majority shifts or shrinks, and it was never a right at all — only a permission, revocable at will. The American theory has always been the opposite. Rights are inherent in the person, Creator-endowed, and placed in the Constitution precisely to put them beyond the reach of election returns. As one older tract on civil authority put it plainly, a right is "something which, in its very nature, is inherent in the one possessing it, independent of the will of all other persons." Popular government exists to protect the minority, the individual, the solitary dissenter — because the majority, by definition, can already take care of itself at the ballot box. Whatever popular support this Commission might invoke for official religious activity, that support cannot substitute for a right, because religion was never among the things submitted to the vote.

I ask you also to consider that a law favoring religion is just as dangerous to free exercise as a law against it. Any statute touching religion must first define which religion, or which practice, qualifies — and that definition will always include some believers and exclude others, while turning even the included into people who practice their faith by permission rather than by right. A believer who welcomes government endorsement of his own creed today is handing a tool to whatever administration holds power tomorrow, including one hostile to everything he holds dear. The wrong lies in religious legislation as such, not in whose beliefs it happens to favor this year.

This is not a new argument for me to make up. Congress itself settled it in 1829 and 1830, when men who had lived through the founding still sat in its halls, and Sabbatarian petitioners demanded federal action against Sunday mail. The committee reports Congress adopted declared it not the legitimate province of the legislature to determine what religion is true or false, since "our government is a civil and not a religious institution." They warned that letting government define one point of religious duty invites it to define them all, down to the forms of worship and the support of the clergy. That is not a modern court's opinion. It is the government's own considered judgment about the limits of its own power, and any Commission proposing government-endorsed religious instruction today must reckon with the fact that it is overruling that precedent, not merely updating it.

Finally, I would ask the Commission to weigh what state endorsement does to religion itself. Force cannot reach the heart; it can fill a pew but not produce belief, and history's verdict on state-sponsored Christianity, surveyed across fifteen centuries by James Madison, was pride and indolence in the clergy, ignorance and servility among the laity. A faith that needs the state's help is confessing something about itself that ought to trouble its own adherents most of all. General Grant said it better than I can: leave religion to the family altar, the church, and private conscience, and keep the state and church forever separate.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
C B Davenport

From: --Kevin C <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:38:56 -0400
Importance: Normal

Please do NOT force religious observation on Sunday....I keep the 7th Day Sabbath.....the 4th Commandment of the 10 Commandments...
I do not want the government to Force its will over anyone on matters of what day we observe for the Sabbath...it is Still the 7th day of them week (Saturday)
NOT the 1st day of the week(Sunday)
America was founded on Religious Liberty....Government shouldforce Anyone to observe or not observe any day of the week....please do not Force me or anyone to violate my conscience by force, by Sunday worship....Keep Liberty of Conscience free...I consider myself a MAGA voter and do not want the force of government to Establish a day of Religious Observance...violating the intent of the Founders, Keep Governent Out Of Any Church and Any Churce Out Of Government...keep the Wall Of Separation Up.

Sincerely,
Kevin Chadbourne

PII
PII

From: Capricia Howard <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:39:48 -0400
Importance: Normal

Time is Running Out: You have Until July 13, 2026, to Make Your Voice Heard

The time to act is now. Submit your concerns to the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission by July 13, 2026, and make your voice heard. Express your objections to the Commission's draft report, which recommends building "bridges" between church and state and reversing the longstanding constitutional principle that government should remain neutral toward religion—neither promoting nor prohibiting the free exercise of faith in America.

Send your email to the Religious Liberty Commission at PII

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Below is my letter to the Commission:

To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

I respectfully submit this public comment out of deep concern for the future of religious liberty in the United States. I urge the Commission to reject any recommendation directed at the Department of Justice or any other branch of government that would weaken the historic constitutional principle of keeping religion and government institutionally separate, as well as any proposal that encourages greater unity between the two.

America's greatest contribution to the cause of religious liberty has not been the state's endorsement of religion, but the protection of every person's God-given right to worship according to conscience without government interference. This principle has allowed religious communities of every tradition to flourish in freedom while preserving civil peace.

As a Bible-believing seventh-day Sabbath keeper, I write from the perspective of a religious minority whose spiritual ancestors experienced firsthand the dangers that arise when government aligns itself with the religious majority. During America's colonial period, Baptists, Quakers, Jews, seventh-day Sabbath keepers, and many other religious minorities endured discrimination, imprisonment, fines, and civil persecution because certain established churches enjoyed the support of the state. These injustices were among the very reasons the Founders rejected religious establishments and adopted the First Amendment.

The experience of Seventh-day Adventists provides another historical warning. During the late nineteenth century, Adventists who faithfully observed God's seventh-day Sabbath were prosecuted under Sunday laws that were imposed, once again, by the religious Christian majority. Some of our fellow believers were fined, imprisoned, and even forced into chain gangs because they chose to honor Saturday as the biblical Sabbath rather than conform to popular Blue Law Sunday observances. Their only offense was obeying the dictates of conscience and remaining faithful to their religious convictions. Their experience stands as a warning that whenever civil authority is used to enforce religious beliefs or practices, freedom of conscience is inevitably endangered, and religious minorities are often the first to endure discrimination and persecution.

The medieval Inquisition demonstrated how religious institutions armed with civil authority suppressed dissent through torture, punishment, and even death. Various forms of religious extremism, including movements that have justified violence in the name of Islam, have shown how state-backed religious ideology can deny liberty of conscience. Likewise, communist regimes that officially embraced atheism illustrate the opposite side of the same error: when government suppresses religion altogether, believers are again persecuted. Though these different oppressive systems differed in ideology, they shared one common characteristic—the concentration of civil power over matters of conscience.

The strength of the American constitutional system is that it avoids these extremes. Government was never commissioned to direct the spiritual lives of the people. The mission of the state is to preserve order, protect individual rights, and secure equal treatment under the law. The mission of the church is altogether different: to preach the gospel, emphasize truth and love through persuasion, not coercion, and call people to a voluntary faith, as Jesus did. These two institutions are strongest and remain uncorrupted when each remains within its proper sphere.

Our nation has become home to a diverse group of churches, synagogues, mosques, and religious communities because government has generally refrained from controlling or establishing religion. This constitutional heritage has protected both the majority and the minority alike. I therefore respectfully urge the Commission to recommend policies that reinforce—not diminish—the constitutional barriers separating ecclesiastical authority from civil government. Religious liberty is best preserved when government neither advances nor inhibits religion but instead protects the equal rights of all people to follow their own conscience.

The United States must remain a nation where every church is free to proclaim its beliefs without governmental control and where every citizen is free to worship—or not to worship—without governmental pressure. History has already taught us the consequences of abandoning this principle. We should not repeat mistakes that countless generations have paid dearly to overcome. For if we do, we would once again be fanning the flames of intolerance, religious bigotry, and injustice.

Respectfully submitted,

Larry Howard - Kentucky

From: Rajj Lee <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Preserve Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:42:10 -0400
Importance: Normal

Respectfully I write this to you.

This great Nation came together on the separation of Church and State not in Constitutional writing but in a joint unity against religious persecution.

The persecution Papal Rome did to 50M+ Christians and people of varying other faiths.

To make this Nation solely a Christian Nation of which I'm a Christian goes completely against what our founding fathers wrote in the Constitution.

This is to be a land where religious liberty is to stand strong and tall whether Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Atheist, satanist, polytheistic or pagan ECT ECT ECT.

To solely push for strictly Christian religion is to tread upon our Constitution that God gave us and our founding fathers related to us.

The very fabric of our Constitution and Republic will wither away if you pass this mandate.

From historical events of this world both government powers and Religious powers uniting has always ended in tragedy.

Please do not pass it.

Sincerely,

Roger Biele II

P.S. God Bless You

From: DMHo[redacted]
To: "RLC (OASG)" [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:42:20 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Representatives,

I am writing as a concerned citizen to express my support for the Johnson Amendment and the continued separation of church and state.

While I value my religious freedom as a Christian, history shows that the union of church and state can lead to religious persecution. It has been said that "national apostasy will lead to national ruin," and I am concerned that we may be heading down a similar path.

I respectfully ask that you give these thoughts prayerful consideration and uphold the protections currently provided by the law.

Respectfully,

Darlene Harper

From: Daryl Williams <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:42:27 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing to respectfully urge the U.S. Religious Freedom Committee to continue defending one of America's most important constitutional principles: the separation of church influence from the coercive power of the state.

History repeatedly demonstrates that when any religion gains the power of government to enforce its beliefs, persecution inevitably follows. This is not unique to any one faith. Whether Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or another religion, history shows that whenever religious authority is combined with governmental power, those who disagree often lose their liberty of conscience.

Examples are abundant. The medieval Catholic Church persecuted those it considered heretics. The Church of England punished those who dissented from its authority. Even the Puritans, who fled persecution in search of religious freedom, later imposed restrictions and penalties upon those who did not share their beliefs. These examples remind us that sincere religious conviction does not eliminate the temptation to use civil authority to compel religious conformity.

The wisdom of America's founders recognized this danger. The original United States Constitution contains no explicit reference to God. Instead, it established a government that protects the religious liberty of all citizens without favoring one faith over another.

Thomas Jefferson expressed this principle in his 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association:

> "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church & State."

Likewise, Article 11 of the 1797 Treaty of Tripoli, unanimously ratified by the United States Senate and signed by President John Adams, states that "the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion." While this statement addressed a specific diplomatic context, it reflects the founders' commitment to a government that neither establishes nor enforces a particular religion.

The American commitment to religious liberty developed from the founders' recognition that history repeatedly demonstrated the dangers of combining civil authority with religious power. Many of the colonists themselves had experienced or were familiar with religious persecution in Europe, where established churches often used the power of government to suppress dissent.

James Madison, often called the "Father of the Constitution," argued that religion flourishes best when it remains independent of governmental control. In his 1785 *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, Madison opposed government-supported religion, writing that religion "can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence." He maintained that every person has an equal right to exercise religion according to the dictates of conscience.

The First Amendment reflects this principle by providing that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." These two clauses—the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause—work together to protect both religious liberty and freedom from government-imposed religion.

The Supreme Court has frequently recognized both the prohibition on governmental establishment of religion and the protection of free religious exercise. For example, in *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947), the Court stated that neither the federal government nor the states may establish a religion or favor one faith over another. In *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* (1943), the Court held that government cannot compel citizens to affirm beliefs or participate in expressions contrary to their conscience, emphasizing that freedom of thought and belief is a foundational constitutional principle. More recently, the Court has also emphasized robust protections for the free exercise of religion while continuing to recognize that the government itself may not establish a religion.

From a Christian perspective, many believers understand the New Testament to teach that Christ's kingdom advances through the work of the Holy Spirit rather than through civil authority. Jesus declared, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), and the apostles spread the gospel through preaching, persuasion, and service rather than governmental power. This understanding has led many Christians throughout American history to support both religious liberty and freedom of conscience for people of every faith.

As a fundamentalist Christian, my concern is not to diminish the importance of faith, but to preserve its integrity. Jesus Christ never relied upon civil government to advance His kingdom. He rejected worldly political power as the means of accomplishing His mission. Instead, He entrusted the spread of the gospel to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit through willing hearts.

The New Testament church did not seek laws compelling worship or religious observance. The apostles preached, taught, persuaded discipled, and served, trusting God to change hearts. Genuine faith cannot be produced through legislation. Civil laws may regulate outward conduct, but they cannot create inward conviction or love for God.

I believe God does not need secular governments to enforce the first four commandments, which govern humanity's relationship with Him. His kingdom advances through truth, love, and the work of the Holy Spirit—not through governmental coercion. Religious laws may produce external compliance, but only God can transform the human heart.

For this reason, I respectfully encourage the Committee to oppose any effort that would merge religious influence with the coercive authority of the state. The surest protection for every believer—and every nonbeliever—is a government that safeguards the free exercise of religion while refusing to establish or enforce religious doctrine.

America's commitment to liberty of conscience has served as a beacon of hope for people of every faith and of none. I pray that this precious freedom will be preserved for future generations.

Respectfully,

Yours in Christ

Daryl G Williams

Meriden, CT

From: Angela Archibalde[redacted]
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:43:43 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Council Members,

Thank you for your desire to do the right thing and make America great again. One thing I love about being an American is that we are free to live, work and worship or not worship as our conscience dictates.

It can be difficult at times to hear people with differing convictions, but the fact that we can think differently and act differently is part of what makes America so great.

I appeal to your sense of justice for all and freedom to prevail as you consider enacting any law that would take away the freedom from others. This would include reserving Sunday as a day to rest. According to my understanding God set aside Saturday as the Sabbath as the day of rest. I do not believe that any day should be set aside by law as a day of rest even though I believe that Saturday should be that day if any day we're going to be.

God gives us freedom to choose Him or reject Him. Freedom to worship Him or not.

I pray that you will follow His lead.

Thank you for reading my email.

Respectfully,

Angela Archibald
Hohenwald, Tennessee

From: Getahun Mega <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and estate is important
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:44:54 -0400
Importance: Normal

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uSA is blessed by the principle it follows that estate or political body are not force or dictate how or what an individual worship.
Please continue to keep this up.
God bless America
Getahun

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment- Separation of Church and State- Rollyn Trueblood
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:45:16 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Commission for Religious Liberty,

I write with profound respect for both our nation's constitutional heritage and its enduring commitment to religious liberty. My perspective has been shaped by several lifelong influences: my Quaker heritage, my family's connection to the Quaker philosopher and theologian D. Elton Trueblood, my faith as a member of the Episcopal Church, and my service as a retired Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Army. Together, these experiences have led me to value deeply the constitutional principle of separation of church and state as an indispensable safeguard of both religious freedom and democratic government.

First and foremost, I write as an American who swore an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. As an Army officer, I served alongside men and women representing many faith traditions—and some with no religious affiliation at all. Our unity did not arise from shared religious beliefs but from our shared commitment to the Constitution and to the freedoms it guarantees. Among those freedoms, none is more fundamental than the liberty of conscience protected by the First Amendment.

My Quaker heritage has reinforced this conviction. The Religious Society of Friends has long taught that every individual must be free to respond to God's leading according to conscience. Early Friends, including my ancestors, endured imprisonment, fines, and persecution because they refused to surrender matters of faith to governmental authority. One of my family members died in an English prison for refusing to pay the tithe tax that subsidized the church of England. This persecution is what brought the Trueblood family to the United States in the 1600s. They found refuge in this land of freedom and flourished under the First Amendment which guarantees the separation of church and state. Their witness reminds us that genuine faith cannot be compelled by law nor strengthened through governmental preference. It must always remain a free response to God's call.

My family's connection to Elton Trueblood further deepens these convictions. He encouraged Christians to engage society with intellectual honesty, humility, and moral courage while resisting the temptation to confuse the mission of the Church with the exercise of political power. His writings reflected the belief that Christianity is most persuasive when it transforms lives through truth, service, and love rather than through governmental influence or privilege.

My membership in the Episcopal Church has likewise strengthened my appreciation for a constitutional order that protects both religious liberty and civic equality. The Episcopal tradition recognizes that the Church best fulfills its mission when it proclaims the Gospel freely and serves the common good without seeking governmental preference or establishment. Such freedom benefits not only Christians but people of every faith and those of no faith.

These influences converge in a common conviction: the separation of church and state is not a threat to religion but one of its greatest protections. The Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause are complementary constitutional principles. Together they ensure that government neither establishes religion nor interferes with its free exercise. They preserve the integrity of religious communities while guaranteeing equal liberty to every citizen.

As I read the Commission's report, I am concerned that its treatment of the separation of church and state risks unsettling this carefully maintained constitutional balance. History consistently demonstrates that when governments align themselves too closely with particular religious traditions, both religious liberty and

democratic equality are weakened. Minority faiths become vulnerable, freedom of conscience is diminished, and religion itself can become entangled with political interests in ways that compromise its spiritual mission.

From my military service, I learned that the Constitution protects every American equally. Soldiers do not defend the freedoms of only those who share their beliefs; they defend the rights of every citizen. That same principle should guide our understanding of religious liberty. Government best protects religion by remaining neutral among faiths while vigorously defending every individual's right to worship, to question, to change beliefs, or to decline religious belief altogether.

America's remarkable religious diversity has flourished because our constitutional system neither compels faith nor grants special privilege to any religious tradition. This framework has allowed communities of faith to thrive through the power of conviction rather than the authority of the state.

I respectfully urge the Commission to reaffirm the enduring wisdom embodied in the First Amendment. A robust commitment to both the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause remains the surest guarantee of religious liberty for present and future generations. Preserving these constitutional principles honors not only our nation's founding ideals but also the sacrifices of generations of Americans who have served to defend them.

As a retired Lieutenant Colonel, a Christian, a member of the Episcopal Church, and one shaped by Quaker heritage and the legacy of D. Elton Trueblood, I believe that authentic faith and constitutional liberty strengthen one another when each respects the proper role of the other. Our nation is strongest when government protects the freedom of conscience without favoring religion and when religious communities bear witness through service, compassion, integrity, and love rather than through political power.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these concerns and for your service to our nation.

Best Wishes,
LTC, USA, Retired

From: Michael P <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT -- Separation of Church and State -- Michael Pruitt
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:46:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Regulatory Licensing and Compliance Section,

Please accept the following comment regarding the legal and historical framework surrounding the doctrine of the separation of church and state.

Thomas Jefferson's original formulation of a "wall of separation between Church & State" in his 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists was explicitly structured as a protection for religious freedom. A central concern behind this principle was that state involvement in religious affairs inevitably leads to the corruption of religious institutions, while religious encroachment on state authority undermines neutral governance.

To preserve genuine religious liberty and maintain neutral public administration, regulatory and policy frameworks must maintain a clear boundary between ecclesiastical matters and government functions. Allowing state authority and religious doctrine to commingle inevitably compromises the integrity of religious practice and distorts objective and equitable legal governance.

I urge the Department of Justice to ensure that all policies and regulatory interpretations enforce a strict separation between government functions and religious entities. Doing so prevents government interference in religious practice and keeps religious institutions from directing governmental authority.

Sincerely,
Michael Pruitt

From: Sharon Tallon <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment- Separation of Church and State-Sharon Tallon
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:47:19 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear RLC,
I would like to express my objection to allowing a bridge between church and state. The separation between church and state has existed since the founding of our great nation. And religious freedom made our nation great. This separation was put in place to escape the tyranny and persecution that existed in times past when religion controlled the state.

I am a believer in following the 10 commandments and allowing people the freedom to choose. The first 4 commandments applies to our relationship with our Creator God. It is a moral choice which cannot be legislated- it is a matter of the hearte No one, or no government can force someone to believe something that pertains to God. Those religious matters are between the Holy Spirit and the individual. Sincere prayer for individuals to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour is the way the Creator God changes heart, not legislation and government trying to get involved.

I agree with the Pillars of Freedom's comments.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Sincerely,
Sharon Tallon
Pasadena, Maryland

From: John Warren <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom Committee Recommendations
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:47:32 -0400
Importance: Normal

I respectfully request that the Department of Justice not adopt recommendations 1 and 9 of the Committee. This would be a bad move for the majority of the United States citizens.

Sincerely,
John Warren

From: Keisha Keddo-Williams <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Keisha Williams in response to pillar of Freedom commission's draft
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:48:38 -0400
Importance: Normal

I agree with the Pillar of Freedom Commission's Draft on the issue of the Separation of Church and State.

I believe that the state should have no power over the choice that God has given me: the power of choose, the right to choose for myself.

In the garden of Eden, our first parents was not compelled to choose God, but instead, they had freedom to choose, even though God knew what the results would be. That is love! Love is not coerced, but free.

Jesus opposed the union of church and state when he said, "give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and unto God what belongs to God.

In the past, the church join the state when the state has lost control of the people, and therefore reached out to the church for help. Is this our current position, have the state lost control of the people? We know from history that this union of church and state has led to the dark ages, where a great massacre claimed the lives of thousands of Christians in Europe and the inquisition in South America. This was the reason that God brought them, the Christians, to this great American country of freedom from papal persecution. Now we want to return to that old tyrant. I disagree, church and state should remain separate.

Remain separate Church and State,

Truly,

Keisha Williams

Sent from my iPhone

From: David Thomaso <PII>
To: "PII" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment on proposed report of Presidental Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:49:06 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Sirs,
I have learned of the essential proposals of the Report of the Presidential Religious Commission. I have some very important concerns regarding the essential proposals of this report. History has many, many examples of the evils of the union of church and state. This union has always resulted in persecution of the religious minority. France in the 1600s to 1700s is a striking example, in the relentless persecution of the Hugenouts by the union of Louis XIV and the Roman Catholic papacy.

I would like to say that this would be opening the door to religious discrimination and ultimately persecution of those religious groups that would be regarded as "dissidents". I am copying some text of a book written in the later 1800's that predicts this very thing occurring in American just before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.
The Great Controversy by Ellen G. White pp. 382-3
"
The woman (Babylon) of Revelation 17 is described as “arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness:...and upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots.” Says the prophet: “I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.” Babylon is further declared to be “that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.” Revelation 17:4-6, 18. The power that for so many centuries maintained despotic sway over the monarchs of Christendom is Rome. The purple and scarlet color, the gold and precious stones and pearls, vividly picture the magnificence and more than kingly pomp affected by the haughty see of Rome. And no other power could be so truly declared “drunken with the blood of the saints” as that church which has so cruelly persecuted the followers of Christ. Babylon is also charged with the sin of unlawful connection with “the kings of the earth.” It was by departure from the Lord, and alliance with the heathen, that the Jewish church became a harlot; and Rome, corrupting herself in like manner by seeking the support of worldly powers, receives a like condemnation.
Babylon is said to be “the mother of harlots.” By her daughters must be symbolized churches that cling to her doctrines and traditions, and follow her example of sacrificing the truth and the approval of God, in order to form an unlawful alliance with the world. The message of Revelation 14, announcing the fall of Babylon must apply to religious bodies that were once pure and have become corrupt. Since this message follows the warning of the judgment, it must be given in the last days; therefore it cannot refer to the Roman Church alone, for that church has been in a fallen condition for many centuries. Furthermore, in the eighteenth chapter of the Revelation the people of God are called upon to come out of Babylon. According to this scripture, many of God’s people must still be in Babylon. And in what religious bodies are the greater part of the followers of Christ now to be found? Without doubt, in the various churches professing the Protestant faith. At the time of their rise these churches took a noble stand for God and the truth, and His blessing was with them. Even the unbelieving world was constrained to acknowledge the beneficent results that followed an acceptance of the principles of the gospel. In the words of the prophet to Israel: “Thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through My comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God.” But they fell by the same desire which was the curse and ruin of Israel—the desire of imitating the

practices and courting the friendship of the ungodly. “Thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown.” Ezekiel 16:14, 15.
Many of the Protestant churches are following Rome’s example of iniquitous connection with “the kings of the earth”—the state churches, by their relation to secular governments; and other denominations, by seeking the favor of the world. And the term “Babylon”—confusion—may be appropriately applied to these bodies, all professing to derive their doctrines from the Bible, yet divided into almost innumerable sects, with widely conflicting creeds and theories."
Thank you for your consideration,
David Thomas

From: davidNic <PII>
To: PII
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Document
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:55:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I write to respectfully express my concern regarding recommendations that could weaken America's historic commitment to the separation of church and state.

In 1960, President John F. Kennedy stated:

> "I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute, where no Catholic prelate would tell the president... and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote."

More than three centuries earlier, Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island and a Baptist minister, argued for "a hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world." He understood that this separation protects both institutions: it prevents government from corrupting the church and prevents the church from using the power of the state to compel conscience.

America's commitment to religious liberty was forged through painful historical experience. Many of the early settlers came to escape government-controlled religion and religious persecution in Europe. They understood that genuine faith cannot be produced by law and that civil government is not equipped to determine matters of conscience.

History repeatedly confirms this truth. Whenever religious institutions have gained the coercive power of the state, liberty has suffered. From the medieval period through the Reformation, countless men and women—including John Wycliffe, Jan Hus, Jerome of Prague, and many others—faced persecution because civil governments enforced religious authority. Regardless of one's theological perspective, history demonstrates that the union of church and state has consistently endangered both religious freedom and civil liberty.

The proper role of people of faith is to influence society through conviction, service, moral example, and persuasion—not through government coercion. Churches should be free to proclaim their beliefs without government interference, and governments should protect every citizen's right to worship, or not worship, according to the dictates of conscience.

As a Christian, I also believe the Bible warns against the union of religious and civil power in matters of conscience. My concern is therefore both constitutional and spiritual. The founders recognized what history had already demonstrated: religious liberty flourishes best when government neither establishes religion nor grants religious institutions the power of the state.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to reconsider recommendations that would blur the historic separation of church and state, including proposals to direct taxpayer funds toward religious activities or to repeal the Johnson Amendment. Such policies risk eroding a principle that has safeguarded both religious freedom and civil liberty for nearly 250 years.

Religious liberty is not merely a protection for one denomination or one faith. It is a protection for every American. Preserving that liberty requires maintaining the careful constitutional balance that has served our nation so well.

Thank you for your service to our nation and for your thoughtful consideration of these concerns.

Respectfully,

David Nicodemus

From: "William, JR Warcholik" <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to Commission.pdfe Google Drive
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:57:02 -0400
Importance: Normal

Please do not let the government be involved in enforcing the first 4 of the Ten Commandments they are between God and the individual person.
I do not want government funds supporting churches . I believe in separation of church and state. We should not try to be like other country's and have a state run church, the result can only lead to persecution. Please learn from the past and not repeat it.

https://protect2.fireeye.com/v1/url?k=a1e9cf08-fe728dfb-a1eeebed-000babdfec90-2a352b0d3db29063&q=1&e=3e156952-8cd7-4476-ad28-409e6be0d5bd&u=https%3A%2F%2Fdrive.google.com%2Ffile%2Fd%2F13wd1AsF3m6STwD-v0ywpXFYnI-VRv8TF%2Fview

Sent from my iPhone

From: LAURE MARIETTAe<[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious freedom is our right
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:58:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

The government has no authority or place to tell me what to believe or how to worship!!

Laure Marietta
Sent from my iPhone

From: Diane Goosey <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church & Stste
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:59:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of Religious Liberty Committee:
I am both surprised & deeply concerned upon learning what is at stake.
The separation of church & state is in fact what made America great for 250 years. It is the reason our founding fathers fled from religious persecution & set up guidelines in our country that protected & ensured our Religious Liberty. Keeping church & state separste strengthens each to function as they should. Please keep our founding fathers' plan intact to protect our precious country beyond our 250 years anniversary.
Thank you.
Sincerely,
Diane Goosey
Birchwood, Tenn

From: Filipe <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] A concerned Christian and US Citizen
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:02:55 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission Representatives,

As a fellow pastor and as one who deeply loves both the church and our country, I feel compelled by my convictions as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ to respectfully express concern regarding several conclusions contained in the Religious Liberty Commission's report.

I wholeheartedly agree that it is important to educate citizens regarding the Establishment Clause and the constitutional principles that have safeguarded religious liberty in America. However, the American tradition of religious liberty has historically been understood as a two-way protection. Thomas Jefferson, as reflected in the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, and earlier advocates such as Roger Williams viewed the separation of church and state as a safeguard both for the church from government interference and for the government from ecclesiastical influence.

Because of this, I am concerned that the Commission's interpretation of religious liberty may unintentionally narrow the range of legitimate perspectives that have historically existed on these issues. When one particular understanding of church-state relations is elevated as the preferred interpretation and then advanced through litigation, there is a risk that sincere individuals, churches, and organizations holding alternative views may find themselves marginalized. Efforts intended to protect religious freedom can, if not carefully limited, become mechanisms that diminish the freedoms of others who are equally committed to constitutional principles.

I am also concerned about the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment. While the desire to protect free speech is understandable, repealing this provision could have unintended consequences for both the church and the nation. Historically, churches have exercised their greatest moral influence when they have remained independent of partisan political movements. Allowing churches to formally endorse political candidates risks drawing congregations into political divisions, shifting attention away from the proclamation of the gospel and the formation of Christian character.

Furthermore, the erosion of the traditional boundaries between ecclesiastical authority and political power has rarely served either institution well. History repeatedly demonstrates that when churches become closely aligned with political parties or candidates, the church's prophetic voice is weakened. Rather than speaking truth to all sides, it can become identified with a particular political agenda. This not only threatens the unity of the church but also undermines public confidence in its spiritual mission.

The church's God-given role is to proclaim biblical truth, make disciples, serve the needy, and call people to faithfulness to Christ. While believers should certainly engage in civic life according to conscience and biblical conviction, decisions regarding political candidates are best left to individual members under the guidance of Scripture, prayer, and the Holy Spirit rather than through institutional endorsements.

My concern is not merely theoretical. The principles of religious liberty that have protected both faith communities and civil government for generations are delicate and can be weakened when either sphere extends beyond its proper role. For this reason, I respectfully urge the Commission to consider the long-term implications of its recommendations and to preserve the historic understanding of religious liberty that protects both church and state from undue influence by the other.

Thank you for your service and for your commitment to the important work of protecting religious freedom. I offer these thoughts in a spirit of respect, recognizing that we share a common desire to preserve liberty of conscience for all.

Sincerely,

Pastor Filipe Ferreira

From: Steve Evans <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:06:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

Please keep our tradition of separation of church and state If we fuse those two institutions together

That will surely mean the passing of religious laws which would thereby make our country no longer the land of religious liberty on which it was founded

My whole family and myself are against fusing state and church together please don't do that.

Yours truly in Christ
S.Evans

From: Sue Schomaker <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PILLAR OF FREEDOM
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:06:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

PUBLIC COMMENT

I agree with the Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.

With appreciation,

Sue Schomaker

From: Joseph Jones <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Important questions arising from the letter to the President's Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:10:09 -0400
Importance: Normal

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
Via EMAIL: [redacted]
RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

Important questions arising from the letter to the President's Religious Liberty Commission

To the honorable members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for allowing the opportunity for feedback concerning the Religious Liberty Committee's recommendations submitted to President Donald J. Trump on June 26, 2026. I write to you respectfully as a "prisoner of conscience," bound by the "faith once delivered to the saints."

When it comes to civil liberties, Americans have always jealously defended their rights through each successive generation. Today there is what is perceived by many to be the most serious threat on the liberty guaranteed to America by its Constitution: this threat is the proposal by certain members of Government and the civil society, to pass laws that would erode the long standing principle of the separation of church and state.

I stand in solidarity with the many voices who have urged upon you the grave consequences that have been the historical reality of the union of church and state firstly in Europe and also among the early settlers of the Colonies. The sordid history of persecution, torture and murders cannot be too distant in history to be forgotten.1 The Pilgrim Fathers set sail not so much in search of wealth and fortune, but to escape the very horrors of religious persecution that blazed throughout Europe, and to secure for themselves and the generations which follow them, the liberty to pursue their own conscience in matters of religion. I am also in agreement that the First Amendment does in truth prohibit any branch of Government to pass or enforce any law concerning the establishment of any religion. The fact of the simple and straightforward wording of the Establishment Clause permits no other interpretation except by those influenced by presupposition.2

In light of these historical and legal considerations, this burning question pertains: Can the government and people of the United States of America, as it stands today as a fully modern and progressive nation, devolve into the type of tyranny and persecution experienced by past generations in America and in Europe?

Where could the American people and Government seek for answers to these questions and under whose authority would they be provided? The question of religious liberty is also, by its very nature, a matter which concerns faith. The answers to these questions should also be sought through the light of faith. Where is this light to be found? Fortunately these answers were provided beforehand: they are already built into the Declaration of Independence and The Constitution of the United States.

Despite the dark and ominous historical context of their day, the Founding Fathers were wise enough to establish their fledgeling nation on the highest possible principle. The United States, by virtue of its most lofty ambition, its sacred destiny, is constituted as "One Nation Under God." The United States of America was founded on the reality of faith as much as on any legal or historical consequence. And because of this God has blessed America, and will continue to bless America, but only as long as it continues to be faithful to the precious covenant that He has made with it: to be a nation where these "self-evident" truths, 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" would be the very foundation upon which this nation would prosper.3

The most sacred liberty of living "under God" is the liberty of the conscience. As God had allowed this liberty to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, so he allows it for all their descendants. The Founding Fathers, realizing the necessity of this liberty for the success of any nation, guaranteed it to every citizen in the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. They wrote this amendment to‘. . . secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity,. . ."4

While this amendment guarantees free expression, it is obvious that the God contemplated in the Declaration of Independence and the religion of the First Amendment is the one associated with the God of the Bible, for this is the God that was acknowledged and worshipped by the Fathers, albeit imperfectly.

Therefore the answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this letter, and the authority who can answer them, are to be found in the very Bible that the Pilgrim Fathers brought along with them. They did not perceive these answers, but they were participating in preparing the answers for us today. If today we can truthfully sing God Bless America, would not this blessing have been from the inception of this great nation? Like Noah in the Ark of safety, God followed the Pilgrim Fathers across the ocean to this fair land: and He transplanted His church on American soil.

How can we know this for sure? God ‘s prophecies had foretold all of this centuries before.

"And the **earth** helped the **woman**, and the **earth** opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth." (Revelation 12:16)

The "earth" spoken of here is the United States of America and the "woman" is the church that Jesus founded.5

"And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb,. . . (Revelation 13:1, AV)5

The lamb like beast is symbolic of America and its founding principle of "one nation under God." The two horns represent the two forms of government envisioned in its Constitution and guaranteed by the First Amendment. The civil government: a government by consent of the people and elected by the people of the people. And the religious one: the governing of each individual by the dictates of his own conscience in all matters concerning religion.6

In this way the Founding Fathers sought to make it impossible for the persecution that the Pilgrim Fathers fled from to ever sink its evil roots into the precious soil of American Liberty. This is the threat of the despotic king united with the threat of the tyrannical cleric. Thus America was birthed as a Protestant Republic. A country destined, by its constitution and covenant before God and man, to forever repudiate the rule of kings over the affairs of men, and more vociferously, to forever repudiate the Roman Papacy, which is the rule of Church and State over the affairs of men.7

The prophecies of God had already pointed to this exact juncture in America's history:

"11 And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. 12 And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. 13 And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, 14 And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. 15 And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. 16 And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: 17 And

that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. 18 Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six." (Revelation 13:11-18, AV)

This blessed country, this lamblike nation, would one day speak "as a dragon."

After 250 years of independence and greatness like no other nation before it, the laws passed in America's legislative councils would no longer be lamblike but dragon-like.
These laws will cause the United States of America to "exercise all the power of the first beast before (it)" and "cause(th) the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, . . ."
Americans will be "caused," or forced by law, to worship the "first beast whose deadly wound was healed, . . ."
Who is this "first beast"? It is none other than the Roman Papacy.8
When the Pilgrim Fathers fled to the shores of America they were fleeing the tyranny of the Papacy: a magisterium using the power of the state to further its religious interests.

Today, through the actions of its Legislative, Executive and Judicial branches of government, the United States of America is rushing right into the arms of an anxiously awaiting Papacy. As the leading country of the world, America's decisions and actions have a global impact.9

"And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. 16 And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: 17 And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name." (Revelation 13: 15-17)

America will become the instrument to enforce the "mark of the beast" on the global level.

The Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave will become the instrument through which the whole world is forced, on pain of death, to worship contrary to conscience.
The uniting of church and state will make the blessed land of America become what the Founding Fathers sought diligently to prevent it from ever becoming: a religious tyrant.10

How could all of this possibly happen? By repudiating its own constitutional covenant, to be "one nation under God," America will leave itself willingly open to the only other alternative.

"1 And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. 2 And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority." (Revelation 13:1-2, AV)

This is the "first beast" whom the United States follows: this is the beast which represents the Roman Papacy.
This first beast, the Papacy, gets its "power" and "seat" and "great authority" from the "dragon."
This "dragon" is identified as ". . . the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." (Revelation 12:9, AV)

America, in passing legislation to unite church and state, is only fulfilling the well laid out and centuries old schemes of the Papacy. If it does so, America will descend from being "one nation under God" to becoming a despotic and satanic country forcing first its own citizens, and then the world, to not only worship contrary to their conscience, but to worship Satan.

As sad and impossible as this may seem, it is what is happening right before our eyes in this present generation. And this spiritual disaster is being vehemently ushered in by none other than professed christians. The very people who should be at the vanguard of protecting religious liberty are the architects of the pending destruction

of America. Just as the Establishment Clause has found a new and different legal interpretation than its original meaning, so has the traditional Protestant interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation found new interpretation among critical biblical scholars.11 People may be sincere in their intentions but "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." (Proverbs 14:12, AV)

The prophecy continues:

"6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, 7 Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.
8 And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

9 And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, 10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: 11 And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. 12 Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Revelation 14:6-12, AV)

America's choice is a simple one. The only choice consistent with its whole history and founding as a great nation. It must remain faithful to the founding principles on which it was established: "One Nation Under God. . ."

This Nation, 250 years from its auspicious founding, must, like those before us,ó' fear God and give glory to Him for the hour of His judgement is come." (Revelation 14: 7)

America is today standing before the judgement seat of God who will weigh her in the balances of Divine Judgement.

Will America continue to fear God and be blessed? or will America be deceived into choosing Barabbas and be cursed?

"Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established;. . ." (2Chronicles 20:20, AV)

To prosper at this time in its history, 250 years after its fateful founding, the People and Government of the United States of America must exercise the wisdom and courage of those who founded it: they must believe and act as "one Nation under God." They must not enact any laws not consistent with the covenant between this Nation, its Government, and God.

This is the message for America today:

". . .; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper." (2Chronicles 20:20, AV)

Whenever God blesses a people He often sends the blessing through the voice of prophecy. He has done so for America also.

"And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." (Revelation 12:17, AV)

". . . worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Revelation 19:10, AV)

In transplanting His church to America, the beast "rising out of the earth" helping the "woman," God would also bless her with the "spirit of prophecy" in order to testify to this country about the truth of Jesus. This blessing came in the life and ministry of Ellen Gould White.12 Her seminal work of warning to America and the world concerning the fateful events which now stand before us13 are faithfully preserved in the book The Great Controversy. This book traces the intertwined history of the Church that Jesus founded with His Apostles, to its descent into the Dark Ages as a church founded on the traditions of men,13 the so called Apostolic Tradition. It continues into the very birth of America and surveys the prophetic line into the future of this nation and of the world. The present situation and the ominous outcomes pending are there recorded for all to heed. At the stroke of a pen America signed its Declaration of Independence. At the stroke of a pen America can plunge itself and the world into an age of darkness surpassing any before experienced by mankind.

What America faces now is a decision of Faith in the God that blesses. The same God who blesses is the same one that curses. So I plead with you, as Jesus does, to "have faith in God."15 This is the Gospel for our time:

"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." (Rev 14:6-7)

America, among all nations, kindred, tongues and peoples, is called now as at its beginning, to fear God.

I urge you all to prayerfully reconsider your pending decision in light of the above. Please take the time to educate yourselves concerning the prophecies briefly mentioned above and to acquaint yourselves with the book The Great Controversy.

You may obtain personal copies for your own perusal or you may read online here:
https://thegreatcontroversy.org

(This is not an affiliate link)

I am the least of many brethren, but if you need to contact me to clarify any point mentioned here please feel free to contact me trough my email address.

Yours sincerely and in hope of the liberty to come by the imminent revelation of the Lord, our Savior Jesus Christ. Maranatha!

Joseph Jones
Georgia State

1 https://www.ccel.org/f/foxe/martyrs/home.html
2 https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-1/
3 https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration
4 https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution
5 https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/133.1996
6 https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/133.2003
7 https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/133.1355
8 https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/133.1994
9 https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/133.2007
10 https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/133.2020
11 https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/133.2016
12 https://cswr.hds.harvard.edu/news/2025/11/14/ellen-g-white
13 "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." (Rev 22:7)

14 “Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” (Mrk 7:7)
15 “And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.” (Mrk 11:22)

From: Jeremy & Nicole Allen <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:11:42 -0400
Importance: Normal

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the recommendations of the Religious Liberty Committee submitted to President Donald J. Trump on June 26, 2026. While we are mindful of the Committee's labors, which resulted in the 12 recommendations released June 26, certain of which we agree with, we write to voice our concerns and objections to the Committee's first and ninth recommendations [1] and its obviously insufficient consideration of the warnings of the Founding Fathers of the dangers of a union of church and state or the many lessons of history regarding same.

The Committee recommended that the Department of Justice "issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state." [2] At the formal release of the Committee's recommendations on the same day, Committee Chair Dan Patrick publicly stated that "the separation of church and state is not in the constitution" and that the phrase "has no constitutional basis." [3]

As citizens and students of history, and as Christians, we are alarmed lest the flawed and unconstitutional view of the Chair of the Committee of the so-called "proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the separation of church and state" prove influential or worse, instructive, to the Department of Justice. If the Committee's opinion of the so-called "proper understanding" of the Establishment Clause is the same as that of its Chair, it is apparent that its understanding is not proper, but rather improper.

Founding Father, "Father of the Constitution", and fourth President of the United States, James Madison, contradicted Chair Dan Patrick's claim that the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution. Madison stated that "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." According to James Madison, the separation of church and state is in the Constitution. As to whether James Madison, who is the principal author of the Establishment Clause, or Dan Patrick, is the greater authority on this subject, we think it not difficult for reasonably minded people to ascertain.
Certainly, the Founding Fathers were all aware of the persecution of the Baptists, Quakers, Jews, and others in some of the colonies. They had seen firsthand the ear croppings, whippings, imprisonment, and hangings in Massachusetts and other colonies.

In Europe, the persecution of the martyrs is well documented. Today we take the Bible for granted but forget that William Tyndale was executed for translating the Bible into the English language, not by atheists but by religious bigots. It was a union of church and state that suppressed speech and the freedom of the press in England. It was a union of church and state that prohibited the work of translation of the Bible, which changed the world. It was a union of church and state that necessitated his flight to Europe. It was a union of church and state that killed him.

We respectfully ask that the Department of Justice, in considering the issue of public guidance of the separation of church and state, consider the history of William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania and early Founding Father, who was repeatedly jailed for his religious faith in England. The Pennsylvania Colony became a haven, not from atheist persecutors but from religious persecutors who did not believe in the separation of church and state. The same is true of Roger Williams, founder of the colony of Rhode Island, who was ordered arrested for declaring that the civil magistrate cannot enforce the first table of the Decalogue. We ask that the Committee take into account the brutal public whipping of President Abraham Lincoln's

five-time great-grandfather, Obadiah Holmes, in the Massachusetts colony, for the "crime" of religious dissent. Obadiah Holmes was not whipped by atheists. He was whipped by Puritan bigots who did not believe in the separation of church and state. We respectfully request that the Department of Justice consider this history in the issuance of public guidance on the subject.

We are concerned that the Committee neglected to take into account the impact of the separation of church and state on the other rights codified in the First Amendment. Free speech and freedom of the press, for example, owe their flourishing in the modern world in large part to the separation of church and state in America. Prior to the protections in the First Amendment, the Roman Catholic Church for centuries maintained a list of banned books called the Index Librorum Prohibitorum. The books were subject to confiscation, and the possession of them resulted in the punishment of the owner.

Unfortunately, the Committee makes no mention of the censorship in this context of Galileo and Kepler, Kant and Locke, John Milton and Maimonedes, John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, David Hume and Edward Gibbon, and many others, all at the behest of the Roman Papacy, which is itself a union of church and state. Free speech in the Western world is the legacy of those who risked the wrath of a unified church and state, often at the cost of their lives. We would also ask that the Department of Justice consider the repeated modern calls from the papal power today for the censorship of the internet and the suppression of free speech, contrary to the First Amendment. [4] We have no doubt that the censorship of Galileo, Kepler, Milton, and others was prosecuted under the justification of the censorship of misinformation, also.

The Roman Church was not alone in this persecution, either. We would ask the Department of Justice in its formulation of public guidance on the separation of church and state to remember the religious persecutions carried out at the behest of John Calvin in Geneva against religious dissenters such as Michael Servetus, who paid with his life for his writings and teachings. Servetus was executed by a union of church and state. We are concerned at the public statements of those who would create such a system in America. [5]

Therefore, we respectfully ask, what proper guidance can the Department of Justice hope to give to the public on the "proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the separation of church and state" if it is directed in its object by a Committee and a Committee Chair, who has neglected to more fully analyze the reasons for the separation of church and state, or the reasons why the United States codified the disestablishment of church and state in the First Amendment in the first instance?

The reference to the wall of separation between church and state is not only mentioned by President Thomas Jefferson in the letter to the Danbury Baptists, which, of course, it is. [6] What is often left out of the narrative is that Jefferson said that he personally believed that the principle of the separation of church and state is codified in the Constitution. Therein, Jefferson wrote: "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church & State." [7]

James Madison wrote, "It is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties. We hold this prudent jealousy to be the first duty of Citizens and one of the noblest characteristics of the late Revolution. The free men of America did not wait till usurped power had strengthened itself by exercise and entangled the question in precedents. They saw all the consequences in the principle, and they avoided the consequences by denying the principle. We revere this lesson too much soon to forget it." [8]

Lastly, we object to the recommendation of the Committee that the Johnson Amendment be removed. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are mindful of Our Lord's words that we "render to Caesar what is Caesar, and to God the things that are God's." [9] Jesus Christ established the principle of the separation of church and state and taught that what belongs to God cannot be rendered to Caesar. The application of this teaching is that religionists, ambitious for civil power, and politicians, ambitious for their endorsement, are to be kept separate in the American system of politics, as the Constitution requires. The union of church and state results in the corruption of both, a result that neither should desire, and neither can afford.

Madison stated that "The 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." [10] And he was right. If the Johnson Amendment is removed, religionists who want civil power will publicly stump and promise their votes and congregational dollars in exchange for political favors, and the politicians will be doubtless all too eager to reciprocate in the form of

legislation that the religionists desire, provided they will aid their attempts to gain office.

In his anonymous treatise published in the Boston Gazette, John Adams, later the second President of the United States, wrote that canon law was a tyrannical form of government, as was feudal law, but that the worst of all forms of governments was a union of the two. [11] And it was Madison who stated that, "In the Papal System, Government and Religion are in a manner consolidated, & that is found to be the worst of Governments."

We respectfully request, therefore, that the Department of Justice not adopt recommendations 1 and 9 of the Committee and that it adopt recommendation 1 of the Committee that it convene a public hearing, with written and oral submissions from the public, to more comprehensively study the question of the separation of church and state in history, and in American history in particular, a study which we would enthusiastically support.

We remain, Yours truly,

Nicole Allen

[1] https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/president-trumps-religious-liberty-commission-delivers-historic-report-draft
[2] Ibid, [Emphasis added].
[3] https://www.chron.com/politics/article/dan-patrick-church-state-constitution-viral-22323383.php
[4] https://protect2.fireeye.com/v1/url?k=da232117-85b863e4-da2405f2-000babdfec90-616950dd2cb5308c&q=1&e=17e1969f-1f3f-4148-bcc7-9285a3b95797&u=https%3A%2F%2Freclaimthenet.org%2Fpope-francis-calls-on-social-media-platforms-to-censor-more-misinformation;
[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAUkMwlWYB8; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMBiPIfx-UA
[6] https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html
[7] https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html – Jefferson here is clearly referring to Congress. That Congress is prohibited by the Constitution from making a union of church and state.
[8] James Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments
[9] Matthew 22:21
[10] James Madison, Letter to Robert Walsh, March 2, 1819.
[11] John Adams, Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law, 1765. https://protect2.fireeye.com/v1/url?k=e18b5466-be101695-e18c7083-000babdfec90-0b3a4ca31d92941f&q=1&e=17e1969f-1f3f-4148-bcc7-9285a3b95797&u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.masshist.org%2Fpublications%2Fadams-papers%2F

From: Squire Jim <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:12:32 -0400
Importance: Normal

Folks,
Our founding fathers were DEISTS, and NOT Christians. Any change to our Constitution towards bridging the gap between Church and State MUST never pass! ALL points of view in religion, including Atheism, must be respected. Whose version of religion would we be focusing on if we change the law? Certainly not Islam, Judaism, or anything other than Christianity! This must not pass! Keep your hands off the view that our founding fathers set forth!!

Jim Helman

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From: Dwayne Gardner <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Cc: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Dwayne Gardner
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:16:25 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen to not only ask you, but to strongly urge you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state. For example, using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics inevitably comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God — these are outcomes that will be like a terminal cancer to the spirituality of the church and the morality of the country.

Please consider this; separation isn't a secular idea. People of faith built it to protect faith, and it is the reason true religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,

Dwayne Gardner

Cleveland, Tennessee

From: Cheryl Olney <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:21:53 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am highly opposed to our government, at any level of government, dictating when, how or where i can worship my God and my savior Jesus Christ.

From: Homer Scott <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and states relations
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:23:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Respected Members of the Committee,
Please recall that Roger Williams said that the two tables from Sinai represented the two aspects of our relationship to God.
The first four commandments deal with our relationship with God. The other commandments deal with our relationship with others. The two great laws embodied love to God and love to fellow human beings.
The second table has to do with standards for interaction with people and defining civility. It can be legislated.
The first table has to do with our personal consciene and cannot be legislated.
The second table can be legislated. Here is the reason for the separation of church and state.
Thank you for your consideration of this.
Sincerely,
Homer and Carol Scott

From: Jack Beaman <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:24:37 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern,

In regards to the separation of church and state, the Federal Government is an entity of rules
And regulations that are upheld by the authority of the state or country.

Religion is a choice. It cannot ansnahould NEVER BE FORCED on any human being. God himself allows us to choose to follow Him OR not.
There should NEVER be any laws to force an individual to follow a certain type of religion.

If the government gets involved in religion it NO LONGER becomes a choice. That to me is the most dangerous thing that can be made to mankind.

I ask you please to NEVER legislate ANY LAW that will force the conscious to do that which God's Word teaches.
Keep Church and State SEPARATION.

ALL SUNDAYS LAWS SHOULD BE ABOLISHED. It forces people into doing something that is not biblical.
God DOES NOT FORCE.

Thank you for considering my email.

With respect,
Jack Beaman
[redacted]

From: [redacted] PII
To: "[redacted] PII [redacted]" <[redacted] PII [redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: PUBLIC COMMENT: Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:24:54 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern:
This was a mistake on my part, please remove the signature at the end of the email I sent yesterday. The instructions said to remove personally identifiable information and I did not realize it was there.

On Sun, Jul 12, 2026 at 1:30 PM [redacted] PII

> To whom it may concern:
>
> I am deeply disturbed by the statements released by this commission. History has repeatedly shown how when the government and church lines disappear, persecution results.
>
> This should be clear by the all the lessons of history and by the war going on as we speak. The Iranian government Is run by it's religion and we can see that the results are clearly counter to freedom.
>
> How is it that we are going to follow their line of reasoning? Many other governments throughout history have followed this same course of action. When religion is fused with government, freedom disappears and ultimately so does the power of that country.
>
> There is a line of separation between church and state and it needs to stay there.

[redacted] PII

From: Charlotte Powers <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State - Charlotte Powers
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:27:19 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was concerned to read that the Commission wants to change the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. Respectfully, that is backwards - and as a person of faith, I find the idea troubling.

That wall wasn't build by secularists to keep religion down. It was put in place by believers for reasons of freedom. A bridge doesn't make the church strong; it allows the government money and political support to come right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering politicians instead of God. History shows what happens when church and state join together, and it isn't good for either one.

Please don't make that bridge. Keep the wall. It will protect much more than constrain it.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Powers
Jemison, Alabama

From: michael Gusky<[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment - “Bridge between church and state”
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:28:42 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Commission Chair, and Vice Chair.

I am writing to express my strong opposition to any efforts that would bridge the gap between church and state. These two entities must remain fundamentally separate.

The government should not provide funding to private, religious entities—including churches, schools, campus clubs, and other institutions or activities—in any manner.
Religious organizations should not be involved in politics, and I firmly believe the Johnson Amendment must remain in place to preserve this boundary.

This principle of neutrality also applies to foreign policy, specifically regarding Israel. There should be no special treatment for or against Israel, or the Jewish community. Neutrality is the necessary approach.

History demonstrates the dangers of combining religion and government. We are taught that early settlers, like the Pilgrims, fled to this nation to escape state-backed religious persecution. Then, even in this country we have had cases of religious beliefs affecting state policy.
Allowing the state to become entangled with religion historically leads to persecution, which contradicts the core values of this country.

I urge you to uphold the strict separation of church and state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael Gusky

Wilson, Michigan

From: "Kathy Cates" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Chuch and State - Mary Kathleen Cates
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:29:57 -0400
Importance: Normal
Priority: normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond in writing to the recent draft report and recommendations by the Religious Liberty Commission. As a citizen of the United States of America and an active, practicing Christian, I applaud efforts to secure and stabilize this basic freedom of our nation, but am responding to what I see as aspects of the report that are deeply troubling and out of alignment with the historical foundations of our nation.

Specifically,

1. The "wall of separation between church and state," while not specifically delineated using those words, is absolutely enshrined in the first amendment to the constitution. Government non-interference with any person's relation to faith and worship (to worship or not to worship) is foundational to the freedom of this great nation.
2. Government funding of faith-based, religious, non-profit activities opens the door to government control over how that funding is used. This includes funding of such diverse activities from soup kitchens to parochial schools, just to name two examples. Government funding for any faith-based activities breaks down the separation of church and state that our founding fathers and founding documents intended. It opens the door to government control; "He who pays the piper calls the tune."
3. The Johnson Amendment should be left intact. Just as government should not have the ability to influence a church's activities by funding them, so the church should not be a political platform for the government. The Johnson Amendment should be fully enforced.
4. Our Creator God, the Lord Jesus Christ, said it succinctly and best when He said, "Render to Caesar that which is Caesar's, and to God what is God's. This is the essence of the separation of Church and State. When a church accepts government funding, or becomes a place of partisan platforming and speech-making, the corruption of politics comes with it, and that is never acceptable. A church must never be answerable to a government, to any politician, or to any political party.

Separation of church and state isn't a secular idea; our founding fathers, knowing the history of persecution in the "old world" put this protection into our Bill of Rights. It has been a bulwark for all Faiths, and a key ingredient to the strength of America.

Please do not remove it or attempt to redefine it; it is essential to who America is and what America stands for.

Thank you for reading this.

Yours truly,

Mary Kathleen Cates
Mohrsville, Pennsylvania

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:32:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

The First Amendment of The Constitution of the United States of America could not state more clearly the doctrine of Separation of Church and State. "Congress shall MAKE NO LAW respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;…." Freedom to worship God according to the dictates of the individual's conscience is essential to a democratic republic. God inspired the founding fathers to make this vital doctrine a pillar of the Constitution. The United States of America came into being for the specific purpose of eliminating the horrific abuses of the Church- State coalition in Europe. The religious tyranny and persecution of so-called "heretics" resulted in millions of lives lost. Their only crime was not wanting to be subjected to massive religious opression. You became not only an enemy of the "Church" by not being willing to submit to the abuses, but the "Church" then turned you over to the State and you were subjected to further penalties and abuse. When our nation passes any law that restricts our God given right to worship Him according to the dictates of our conscience, then our nation has disconnected herself all righteousness and the Lord will cease to bless this nation as He has done for the last 250 years. He has loved and blessed this country because it has provided a refuge from tyranny and abuse of all kinds but particularly a refuge from religious persecution. When our nation begins to persecute its own people for their religious beliefs, America will cease to be God's favored nation as it has always been. I urge you to take a closer look at the doctrine of Separation of Church and State and our God given Constitution and realize that the First Amendment is the jugular vein of a free and democratic republic.
Sincerely, Sharon James.

Sent from the all new AOL up app for iOS

From: Greg Carey <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to the Religious Liberty Committee Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:34:02 -0400
Importance: Normal

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENTe- Separation of Church and State – Gregory Carey

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:
I'm writing as a citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state — especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.
I am enclosing several compelling quotes of those who played a pivotal role in the forging of this great nation from its inception. The principles they embraced have served to keep this a stable and freedom-loving nation.
Religious Persecution was a major force driving European migration to the New World in the 16th and 17th centuries. Many European societies enforced strict religious uniformity, often punishing dissenters with imprisonment, exile, or even execution. Both Catholic and Protestant authorities targeted minority faiths, believing it was the duty of the state to uphold a single "true" religion.
Puritans, Anabaptists, Mennonites, Quakers, and Huguenots were persecuted. Facing violence and legal penalties, many sought refuge in North America, especially in more tolerant colonies in New England and Pennsylvania. For these groups, the New World represented a place to build societies where they practice their faith freely away from the reach of hostile governments and established churches.
Roger Williams who laid the bedrock of the vital freedoms woven into the U.S. Constitution 100 years prior to its composition, wrote in his book, *The Bloudy Tenet*,
"It is the will and command of God that, since the coming of his Sonne the Lord Jesus, a permission of the most Paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or Antichristian consciences and worships, bee granted to all men in all Nations and Countries." …
" I must profess, while heaven and earth lasts, that no one Tenet that either London, England, or the world doth harbor, is so heretical, blasphemous, seditious, and dangerous to the corporal, to the spiritual, to the present, to the eternal good of men, as the bloody Tenet . . . Of persecution for cause of conscience."
Thomas Jefferson expressed that concept when he drafted the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom -Draft for a Bill to Establish Religious Freedom in Virginia (1779).
S e c t i o n I.
Well aware that the opinions and belief of men depend not on their own will, but follow involuntarily the evidence proposed to their minds; that Almighty God hath created the mind free, and manifested his supreme will that free it shall remain by making it altogether insusceptible of restraint; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments, or burthens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, who being lord both of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was in his Almighty power to do, but to extend it by its influence on reason alone;
"We the General Assembly of Virginia do enact that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities"
James Madison, lent his great influence in the compiling of the U.S. Constituion. In a letter he wrote to Edward Livingston on July 10, 1822, he stated: "Every new and successful example therefore of a perfect separation between ecclesiastical & Civil matters is of importance. **And I have no doubt that every new example will**

succeed, as every past one has done in shewing that Religion and Govt. will exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together."

When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free and thriving

Sincerely,
Gregory Carey
Athens, Alabama

From: Jeffrey Powers <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State - Jeff Powers
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:34:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was concerned to read that the Commission wants to change the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. Respectfully, that is backwards - and as a person of faith, I find the idea troubling.

That wall wasn't build by secularists to keep religion down. It was put in place by believers for reasons of freedom. A bridge doesn't make the church strong; it allows the government money and political support to come right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering politicians instead of God. History shows what happens when church and state join together, and it isn't good for either one.

Please don't make that bridge. Keep the wall. It will protect much more than constrain it.

Sincerely,
Jeff Powers
Jemison, Alabama

Sent from my iPhone

From: Linda Shattuck <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State Appeal
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:34:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Freedom Commission,

I am deeply concerned about recent comments and the possible decision of combining church and state. The clear distinction our country has between church and state has afforded everyone the freedoms to worship and make moral decisions based on their personal religious convictions as their freedom of conscience dictates. Our history shows that when the state mingles and crosses the line in dictating and enforcing the states mandates over the rights of its peoples in regards to religious beliefs based on Liberty of conscience, persecution has always followed. God has given every individual the freedom of choice, even when it opposed His law and ordinances He allows each created being to be a free moral agent. Combining church and state and saying there is no separation between the two is dangerous and is contrary to our Constitutions deeply held belief and practice of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that is grounded in freedom of choice and liberty of conscience. Let history (the past and not so present past) bring about persecution due to the states overarching power into religious matters even if under the guise of "what is best". Please keep them separate.

Thank you,

Linda Shattuck

From: Derek Woods <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Concerns with commission report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:35:22 -0400
Importance: Normal

Greetings,

I am writing to express my full support of the response to the Commission's report given in the July 6 emailed letter from Pillaroffreedom.org, written and signed by Jonathan Zirkle. The threats to religious liberty from secularism and atheism in this country are real, but removing the separation of church and state would not remedy the situation, but rather create a new and more dangerous threat to religious liberty itself. Please reconsider the recommendation to repeal the Johnson amendment and to remove the wall of separation that has preserved our freedoms for so long.

Yours in freedom,
Derek Woods

From: Carol King <[redacted]>
To: Religious Liberty Commissione[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:36:14 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am aware of the report of the Religious Liberty Commission. I do not agree that separation of church and state should be done away with. Our forefathers fled from Europe to America to escape the religious persecution there as a result of the union of church and state. During the early years of the colonies the civil government persecuted those who did not adhere to the religion of whoever was in power. Roger Williams was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for what they viewed as the radical idea of advocating for the separation of church and state. He embraced the idea that the state should have nothing to do with the first table of the 10 Commandments because they were a matter of conscience between a man and his God. He set up the state of Rhode Island as a state of religious tolerance with the separation of church and state. God blessed Rhode Island and it prospered. Other colonies took note and adopted the principle of the separation of church and state. These are the tenants that our constitution is based upon. This is the America that we know and love.

The Bible says history repeats itself.

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. -Ecclesiastes 1:9

History tells us that the inevitable result of combining church and state is religious persecution of dissenters.

Jesus Himself advocated for the separation of church and state.

And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him. -Mark 12:17

I pray that this administration and the Religious Liberty Commission will heed the words of our Saviour and learn from history and leave in place the separation of church and state.

Carol King

Sent from my iPhone

From: Ivana Baker <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:40:24 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Representative,

I am writing to express my strong support for keeping church and state separate. Religious freedom is one of the foundations of the United States, and it can only be protected when the government does not establish, promote, or favor one religion over another.

Thomas Jefferson strongly believed that religious faith should be protected from government control. He helped create the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, which declared that no person should be forced to support or participate in a religion against his or her beliefs. Jefferson also described the First Amendment as creating a “wall of separation between church and state.”

This separation was not designed to remove religion from society. Instead, it was intended to protect both religion and government. When the government becomes involved in religion, it may favor certain beliefs while excluding others. It may also pressure citizens to practice a religion they do not believe in. At the same time, political power can weaken or corrupt religious institutions by turning matters of faith into matters of government control.

Americans come from many different religious backgrounds, and some citizens do not practice a religion at all. Every person should have the freedom to worship, pray, and follow their conscience without government interference. No one should feel that they are less valued as an American because their beliefs are different from those supported by government officials.

Merging church and state could threaten the religious liberty that Thomas Jefferson and other early American leaders worked to protect. Faith should be freely chosen, not encouraged, required, or controlled by the government.

I respectfully ask you to oppose any law, policy, or action that would weaken the separation of church and state. Please continue to protect the constitutional rights of all Americans and preserve the freedom of religion for future generations.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ivana Baker

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From: Greg Careyo[redacted]
To: "RLC (OASG)" [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to the Religious Liberty Commission Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:40:54 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: letter_to_the_RLC_July_13th,_2026.docx

Dear Members, attached is my response. Thanks for your service and your consideration.

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Gregory Carey

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:
I'm writing as a citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state — especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.
I am enclosing several compelling quotes of those who played a pivotal role in the forging of this great nation from its inception. The principles they embraced have served to keep this a stable and freedom-loving nation.
Religious Persecution was a major force driving European migration to the New World in the 16th and 17th centuries. Many European societies enforced strict religious uniformity, often punishing dissenters with imprisonment, exile, or even execution. Both Catholic and Protestant authorities targeted minority faiths, believing it was the duty of the state to uphold a single "true" religion.
Puritans, Anabaptists, Mennonites, Quakers, and Huguenots were persecuted. Facing violence and legal penalties, many sought refuge in North America, especially in more tolerant colonies in New England and Pennsylvania. For these groups, the New World represented a place to build societies where they practice their faith freely away from the reach of hostile governments and established churches.
Roger Williams who laid the bedrock of the vital freedoms woven into the U.S. Constitution 100 years prior to its composition, wrote in his book, *The Bloudy Tenet*,
"It is the will and command of God that, since the coming of his Sonne the Lord Jesus, a permission of the most Paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or Antichristian consciences and worships, bee granted to all men in all Nations and Countries." …
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Thomas Jefferson expressed that concept when he drafted the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom -Draft for a Bill to Establish Religious Freedom in Virginia (1779).
S e c t i o n I.
Well aware that the opinions and belief of men depend not on their own
will, but follow involuntarily the evidence proposed to their minds; that
Almighty God hath created the mind free, and manifested his supreme will that
free it shall remain by making it altogether insusceptible of restraint; that all
attempts to influence it by temporal punishments, or burthens, or by civil
incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a
departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, who being lord both of

body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was in his Almighty power to do, but to extend it by its influence on reason alone;
"We the General Assembly of Virginia do enact that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities"

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When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free and thriving

Sincerely,
Gregory Carey
Athens, Alabama

From: Helen Faulk <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State-Helen F.
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:44:45 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the Commission's proposal to replace the socially established standard of the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." This change could lead to severe social upheaval and harm communities that do not align with the standards outlined in the Commission's report.

First, repealing the Johnson Amendment in an era of rapid social media influence risks dividing faith networks over political candidate choices, increasing community polarization rather than protecting religious freedom. Historical examples show that public moral-political standards of behavior often become coercive on a broader scale.

Second, allowing faith groups to compete for federal bids and grants violates the First Amendment by effectively favoring the winning groups. Furthermore, because these funds come from taxpayers who may not agree with the values or projects of a specific faith network, this practice indirectly compromises the public's religious freedom and lacks accountability.

Lastly, the report fails to address the religious freedom of those who choose not to adhere to a faith. True religious liberty must include the right to decline faith-based conversions and displays without fear of retaliation or punishment.

Faith is a matter of personal conscience. Public funds and government protocols should not be used to support what should remain anchored in personal conviction. To protect religious liberty, the Commission should instead provide resources that encourage different faith groups and individuals to interact respectfully alongside one another in accordance of the spirit of Religion liberty.

The wall between church and state protects both the individual conscience from government overreach and the government from being overburdened by personal religious aims. Please maintain the separation of church and state to ensure both remain free.

Sincerely,

Helen Faulk
Bon Aqua, TN

From: Ivana Baker <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Keep Church and State Separate
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:45:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

Presidential commission on Religious Liberty
US Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania ave ,NW
Room 5706
Washington DC, 20530
Dear Representative,

I am writing to express my strong support for keeping church and state separate. Religious freedom is one of the foundations of the United States, and it can only be protected when the government does not establish, promote, or favor one religion over another.

Thomas Jefferson strongly believed that religious faith should be protected from government control. He helped create the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, which declared that no person should be forced to support or participate in a religion against his or her beliefs. Jefferson also described the First Amendment as creating a “wall of separation between church and state.”

This separation was not designed to remove religion from society. Instead, it was intended to protect both religion and government. When the government becomes involved in religion, it may favor certain beliefs while excluding others. It may also pressure citizens to practice a religion they do not believe in. At the same time, political power can weaken or corrupt religious institutions by turning matters of faith into matters of government control.

Americans come from many different religious backgrounds, and some citizens do not practice a religion at all. Every person should have the freedom to worship, pray, and follow their conscience without government interference. No one should feel that they are less valued as an American because their beliefs are different from those supported by government officials.

Merging church and state could threaten the religious liberty that Thomas Jefferson and other early American leaders worked to protect. Faith should be freely chosen, not encouraged, required, or controlled by the government.

I respectfully ask you to oppose any law, policy, or action that would weaken the separation of church and state. Please continue to protect the constitutional rights of all Americans and preserve the freedom of religion for future generations.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ivana Baker

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From: Vi Viso [redacted]
To: "RLC (OASG)" [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] June 26, 2026 Historical Report Draft
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:46:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Member of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to submit my formal public comment expressing total opposition to the recommendations put forward in the June 2026 draft report. Rather than protecting true religious freedom, this document outlines an alarming blueprint to systematically break down the constitutional wall between church and state, while simultaneously narrowing the religious liberties of everyday Americans.

True religious freedom requires the government to remain strictly neutral. By attempting to elevate a singular, preferred religious viewpoint to a position of federal backing, this report actively undermines the First Amendment. I urge the Commission to completely reject the following recommendations before a final report is issued.

1. The Subversion of the Johnson Amendment
The recommendation to eliminate or weaken the Johnson Amendment directly threatens the independence of both our political system and our houses of worship. Allowing tax-exempt religious institutions to funnel money into political campaigns and endorse candidates turns sacred spaces into partisan tools. This narrows religious liberty by forcing churchgoers into politically divided congregations and inappropriately subsidizes political speech through tax-exempt dollars.

2. The Diversion of Public Funds to Religious Education
The report's push to expand federal voucher programs and direct public tax dollars to religious private schools is a direct violation of the Establishment Clause. Public funds must support public education, which serves all children equally. Forcing taxpayers to fund religious instruction-including schools whose doctrines they may fundamentally disagree with-is a severe infringement on individual freedom of conscience.

3. The Weaponization of "Conscience Protections" to Discriminate
The report seeks to radically expand "Free Exercise" rights for corporations, government-funded agencies, and healthcare providers at the direct expense of individual citizens.

In Healthcare: Expanding medical refusal clauses allows providers to deny essential care to patients based on religious dogma, compromising patient safety and autonomy.

In Social Services: Allowing taxpayer-funded adoption and foster care agencies to reject qualified families based on sexual orientation or religion is state-sanctioned discrimination.

In the Workplace: Broadening corporate religious rights allows private business owners to override federal labor protections, stripping employees of their reproductive healthcare benefits and civil rights.

4. The Exclusion of Minority Faiths and Non-Religious Americans
Religious Liberty must be absolute and equal for all people. The draft report focuses almost exclusively on protecting majority Chrisitan institutions while largely ignoring the documented rise of discrimination against Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist Americans, as well as the rapidly growing secular population. By favoring one religious tradition, the report inherently narrows the freedom of all others.

Conclusion:
The recommendations in this report do not defend liberty; they attempt to create a dangerous union between church and state that historical precedent proves will lead to oppression, division, and the erosion of minority rights. I demand that the Commission uphold the strict separation of church and state-the very framework that has allowed diverse religious expression to thrive peacefully in America for over two centuries.

Sincerely,

MarieAnne (Vi) Vis
1 Thessalonians 5:23-4
"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly:
and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body
be preserved blameless unto the coming of our
Lord Jesus Christ.
Faithful is he that called you, who also will do it."

From: Preston Foster <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Cc: Preston Foster <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:48:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

This is to urge you to embrace the benefits to religion and to religious freedom from the separation of church and state.

The separation of church and state was the clear original intent of the founders whose ideas formed both the Declaration of Independence (Jefferson) and 1st Amendment to The Constitution (Madison), itself. Separation of church and state is both the true conservative position and what allows religion to flourish in a free society.

As you know, the term “separation of church and state” comes from Jefferson’s letter to the Danbury Baptists, advocating for a "wall of separation"— for the protection of the religious freedom of a (then) religious minority. Madison, “The Father of the Constitution,” listed 15 reasons (in Madison’s Remonstrances) why, in a free republic, church and state should remain separate. To state that church/state separation was not the intent of the founding fathers is dishonest, at best. The ideas of Jefferson and Madison were codified in our American creed, The Declaration of Independence, and in The Constitution. Further, the movement to integrate church and state is a dangerous return to the European model — which yielded centuries of bloody religious wars and a stifling of evangelism. There is no history where the integration of church and state worked well for free people. If fact, church and state integration is the catalyst to religious persecution. This is clear, currently, in theocratic countries like Iran.

I respectfully urge you to do what you know to be right. Political expedience in God’s name, violates the 2nd Commandment, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.” Resist the hypocrisy. God does not force compliance. Neither should the state. Do not politicize religion. It is ungodly.

Sincerely,

Preston Foster
Huntsville, AL

From: Jacques Clouseau <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:48:28 -0400
Importance: Normal

The main problem with separation of church and state is the the term has been hijacked to mean you can't be in government and also be religious or you can't say American was built on Judeo Christian principles. They also try and say that most of the founders were agnostic or something else, but when you read their writings most were of some religious persuasion or another. True speration of church and state is that as a government, there is no official religion, especially a government ran one such as the Church of England. Citizens are allowed to believe or not believe as their conscience decides, not by a government mandate, on who, what, when and where to worship. Any legitimate government makes sure the last 6 of the 10 commandments are upheld, the first 4 belong to God. Government must not interfere or take the place of the first 4 commandments.

As regards to the Johnson Amendment I see pros and cons to both sides. I propose a hybrid model below:

A strong hybrid alternative to the Johnson Amendment would separate a leader's verbal freedom of speech from the group's financial bank accounts. [1, 2] Legal scholars, religious freedom advocates, and tax experts have proposed various versions of this compromise. The goal is to allow moral and religious leaders to speak freely while ensuring that tax-deductible money cannot be used to buy elections. [1, 2, 3, 4]
A structured four-part hybrid plan could look like this:

1. The "Pulpit Protection" Rule (Free Speech)

* The Rule: Pastors, rabbis, imams, and nonprofit directors would be completely free to verbally endorse or oppose political candidates during normal services or internal meetings. [5] * Founder Alignment: This honors the First Amendment's [Free Exercise Clause](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_Exercise_Clause) and James Madison's belief that the government has no right to script or censor what is said inside a house of worship. It restores the historic role of the pulpit as a place for moral and social leadership. [1, 6]

2. The "Zero-Expenditure" Firewall (No Dark Money)

* The Rule: A nonprofit or church cannot spend a single dollar of its budget on political campaigns. It cannot buy political TV ads, print candidate lawn signs, or donate directly to campaigns. [1, 4]
* Founder Alignment: This addresses Thomas Jefferson's fear of a "state church" or government-subsidized religion. Because donations to 501(c)(3) groups are tax-deductible, forcing taxpayers to indirectly fund a church's political ad campaign would violate the principle that no citizen should be forced to fund a religion they do not believe in. [4, 7, 8]

3. The "De Minimis" Safe Harbor (Common Sense Cost Tracking)

* The Rule: If a pastor gives a political sermon, the minor costs already paid for—like lighting the building, printing the weekly bulletin, or streaming the audio online—are completely ignored by the IRS. These are treated as de minimis (too small to matter). [3]
* Founder Alignment: This stops the government from acting like a tyrant. Under the current law, the IRS theoretically has to investigate a church just for using its microphone to mention a candidate. A safe harbor protects religious liberty by keeping IRS agents from auditing churches over everyday speech. [6]

4. Secular Equality (No Special Carve-Outs)

* The Rule: This new law would apply equally to all 501(c)(3) groups, whether they are a church, an environmental charity, or a soup kitchen. [9, 10, 11]
* Founder Alignment: In 2025 and 2026, the IRS tried to settle lawsuits by creating a loophole only for churches, which federal judges rejected. The Founders believed in equal justice under the law. A true hybrid model ensures the government does not show favoritism toward religious nonprofits over secular ones, protecting the [Establishment Clause](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Establishment_Clause). [9, 10, 12, 13, 14]

Summary of the Compromise

Feature	Current Johnson Amendment	The Proposed Hybrid Alternative
Speech from the Pulpit	❌ Strictly Banned	Allowed (Protects Free Speech & Religion)
Spending Group Funds on Candidates	❌ Strictly Banned	❌ Still Banned (Protects Taxpayer Dollars)
IRS Micro-Audits on Speech	⚠️ Allowed if triggered	❌ Banned via a safe harbor loophole
Who the Rule Applies To	Every 501(c)(3) group	Every 501(c)(3) group (Ensures equality)

This hybrid model strikes a balance: "Talk all you want, but don't spend tax-deductible cash." It treats religious leaders as free citizens with voices, while protecting the integrity of the tax code and democratic elections. [1, 4]

[1] [https://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu](https://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3132&context=facsch_lawrev)
[2] [https://lawscholars.luc.edu](https://lawscholars.luc.edu/ws/portalfiles/portal/40470783/A_New_Johnson_Amendment.pdf)
[3] [https://papers.ssrn.com](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID3672383_code1087278.pdf?abstractid=3672383&mirid=1)
[4] [https://canopyforum.org](https://canopyforum.org/2025/12/17/defending-the-johnson-amendment-as-a-critical-tool-to-preserve-democracy-and-religious-freedom/)
[5] [https://www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCxK0xGEH0A&t=13)
[6] [https://digitalcommons.tourolaw.edu](https://digitalcommons.tourolaw.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2037&context=scholarlyworks)
[7] [https://campaignlegal.org](https://campaignlegal.org/cases-actions/fighting-dark-money-defending-johnson-amendment-national-religious-broadcasters-et-al)
[8] [https://taxpolicycenter.org](https://taxpolicycenter.org/taxvox/how-much-politicking-could-churches-do-if-trump-destroys-johnson-amendment)
[9] [https://journals.library.columbia.edu](https://journals.library.columbia.edu/index.php/taxlaw/article/download/14783/8075)
[10] [https://taxprofblog.aals.org](https://taxprofblog.aals.org/2026/06/21/columbia-journal-of-tax-law-publishes-new-issue-5/)
[11] [https://www.taxnotes.com](https://www.taxnotes.com/research/federal/other-documents/other-court-documents/amici-argue-johnson-amendment-consent-decree-unlawful/7swwc)
[12] [https://www.au.org](https://www.au.org/johnson-amendment-lawsuit/)
[13] [https://charitylawyerblog.com](https://charitylawyerblog.com/2026/07/06/the-johnson-amendment-survived-another-challenge-heres-where-things-stand/)
[14] [https://ffrf.org](https://ffrf.org/news/releases/ffrf-cautions-trump-administration-against-undermining-nonprofit-politicking-ban/)

Lastly, I have been affected at work more times than I can count for my Sabbath Day of rest. Too many business and government have protections and higher pay for Sunday. By making a certain day over another is an infraction of religious liberty. Craft an alternative that allows a day in keeping with the individual's religious observation. Rights and freedom are for individuals, not a corporate covering; to deny anyone one person is tantamount to denying a right to all. Thank you

Respectfully,

Stephen A. Spahn

From: LdF <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Li Shan Firman
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:48:37 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen who chose this country in part because of its promise that government would never dictate the terms of anyone's faith. I came here to help build something better, and I have always understood that the wall between church and state is not an obstacle to that project but one of its foundations. I ask the Commission to keep that wall standing.

Consider first where religious liberty actually comes from. If it were simply a permission that the majority hands out, the same majority could take it back tomorrow, and it would never have been a right at all. The older tract on the limits of civil authority put the definition plainly: a right, by its nature, is inherent in the person who holds it, independent of anyone else's will. Popular government exists to protect exactly this kind of thing, because a majority hardly needs protecting from itself. As one witness told a Senate committee long ago, the people, however many there are, have no right to invade another person's relationship to God. That principle does not bend just because today's majority happens to be a religious one.

There is a deeper reason government cannot touch religion at all: it was never given the power in the first place. Just government rests on powers the people delegate, and no person can delegate his own belief, worship, or answer to God on someone else's behalf. To hand over one's faith would be to hand over the soul itself, which cannot be done. Since that power was never given, it was never received, and no government can ever stand accountable at a judgment it will never face on any individual's behalf.

Even a law that favors religion, rather than restricting it, destroys free exercise, because any such law must first define which religion counts, and that definition always includes some and excludes others. As one advocate told a Senate committee, it is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit its free exercise. Worse, a believer who accepts legislative favor for his own current faith quietly forfeits his right to follow his conscience if it should ever lead him elsewhere. Religious liberty must include the liberty to keep searching, not just to hold still.

Finally, coercion cannot produce the thing religion actually requires. A law can march a body into a pew; it cannot put love of God into a heart, and forcing the attempt only manufactures hypocrisy. History bears this out: fifteen centuries of established Christianity produced, in Madison's accounting, pride and indolence among clergy and superstition and persecution among the people. A faith worth anything does not need the police power to sustain it, and a faith propped up by the state is the one most likely to be hollowed out by it.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Li Shan Firman

Li Shan Firman
https://www.amazingfacts.org

From: Raymond Betz <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Request
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:48:43 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the leaders of our country,

Please protect our religious liberty by protecting the separation of church and state in our vreat country. Thanks!

Blessings,
Raymond Betz

From: Robert Gustafson <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious freedom
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:48:47 -0400
Importance: Normal

I fully belive this country was founded because of the need for religious freedom and it should be fully supported for our future!
Respectfully
Robert Gustafson

From: é"[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Draft
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:51:18 -0400
Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them!

Sent from my iPhone

From: ELAINE TURNER <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:53:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the recommendations submitted on June 26, 2026.

As a Christian and American, I am concerned about recommendations 1 and 9, especially regarding the separation of church and state. Religious freedom is a vital blessing, and history shows the harm that occurs when government and religion become too closely linked.

Figures like William Tyndale, William Penn, and Roger Williams suffered for their beliefs, often at the hands of religious authorities backed by government power. The issue was not faith itself, but its union with political authority.

I am also troubled by the claim that separation of church and state lacks constitutional basis. James Madison and Thomas Jefferson both warned against close ties between religion and government. Jesus Himself distinguished between civic and spiritual duties.

My faith belongs to God, not the government. I do not want the state controlling religion or religious leaders using government power to impose beliefs.

I am also concerned about removing the Johnson Amendment. Churches should focus on worship and spiritual growth, not partisan politics, which could divide congregations.

I respectfully urge reconsideration of recommendations 1 and 9 and suggest a public hearing to gather broader input.

Religious freedom is best protected when church and state remain separate.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Elaine B. Turner

From: Mercedes Richard <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:54:53 -0400
Importance: Normal

I believe that the separation of church and state is important to be maintained, else any one, of any faith, be endangered.

From: Julie Brown <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Support for Religious Freedom and the Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:55:23 -0400
Importance: Normal

Members of the US Religious Liberty Commission,

Please support the separation of church and state that we as Americans have enjoyed all these years. My religion should not be influenced by my government, just as my government should not affect my religion. They are separate. It's that simple.

Sincerely,
Julie Brown
[redacted]

From: ⭐Sybil Naumer <[redacted]>
To: "rlco gov"o<[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State - a Religious Liberty principle
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:55:35 -0400
Importance: Normal

Esteemed Committee Members and fellow citizens:

Thank you for giving us a comment period on this RL draft document.

After 250 years of historical practice of separation of church and state, one cannot simply say there is no separation of church and state in an attempt to make it so. The Constitution and the laws of this land protect against such assumptions from the state. We urge The Religious Liberty Committee to reevaluate its stance on this particular issue.

Separation of church and state protects freedom. Mixing religion and government lets the state impose its will upon everyone, leading to discrimination and tyranny. Religion is personal. Government must stay neutral to protect everyone's right to believe or not believe without interference. History proves religious states oppress. That is why America was founded as a place of refuge where the state would not, could not, interfere with freedom of conscience.

The Christ of the universe made clear our obligations by saying, "Render therefore the things that are Caesar's, and to God those things that are God's. - Matthew 22:21. Also, upon writing the ten commandments handed to Moses, the first table contains those things which belong to God. The second table relates to civil matters. The principle of separation of church and state is plain and much older than this young land of ours that we cherish. It became a God-ordained haven to the troubled and oppressed. We do not need to rewrite its historical significance. Please reconsider the Committee's position on this profoundly important subject.

Thank you for your work.

Respectfully,

Sybil Naumer

Sent from Proton Mail for iOS.

From: Uriel Vidal <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment - establishment clause - Victoria Vidal
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:55:59 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the religious commission.

I am eleven years old, and I love my church very much. I am writing because I am afraid of what happens when church and state get united. The Bible says that this kind of union brings persecution, and I do not want to be persecuted. I want to be free to worship on the day I choose and believe as I choose, without fear. That is why I am asking the Commission to defend religious liberty with all its strength, for every person, not only for people like me.

Jesus said to give to Cesar what belongs to Cesar and to give to God what belongs to God. He separated church and state. My dad always tells me stories of how difficult were the persecutions in the past and how it will be more difficult when persecution will happen in the future. I'm very happy that today there is no more persecution in America. Please, keep it like this, church and state separated. Thank you.

Victoria

From: Paula jean Whitney <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Oppose the recommendation to bridge state and church
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:59:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

As a Christian the recommendation by the commission to bridge the wall of separation of church and state scares me. The first amendment was enacted by Christian leaders to protect Christian faith from over reach of government control and was not some secular entity. Because Christian leaders know the church needs to operate on their own conscience and dictates of their heart not the government. It has worked since the founding of our country, why change what isn't broken.

We know the history of the Dark Ages. It's the very reason why our founding fathers' family flee to this country. To escape the persecution of the church and state power. Unfortunately it was repeated her by puritans and other religions. So the likes of Roger Williams knew the benefit of the separation of state and church, for he himself was persecuted and was a pastor.

And funding religious activities or allowing political agendas (repealing Johnson amendment) in the church will create a division among people of faith. There will be fights over who and what religion should get funding. And who will decide which religion is more important than another?

When government meddle with church usually persecution of dissenting voices because of the favored main religion by the government will be inevitable. It will be a repeat of the Dark Ages. It was wisdom and experience of persecution that made our founding fathers enacted the wall of separation between state and church.
Please reconsider what you are recommending be done in our country. We do not need to bridge them.

Thank you,
Paula

From: Deanna Sowers <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Our freedom
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:00:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

We need to keep Church and state separated, so nobody can tell us what we should be doing or what we should be thinking that's what the non-state is all about that USA believes that each person should have their own choice where to worship and how to worship
I

Get Outlook for iOS

From: Shirley Mellette <PII>
To: PII
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:00:27 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Commission's draft report. I appreciate the Commission's concern for those who have experienced discrimination or hostility because of their religious convictions. Every person should be free to live according to conscience and to participate fully in public life without being required to conceal or surrender sincerely held beliefs.

I also appreciate the report's acknowledgment that government may not officially prefer one religion over another, take over the functions of a church, or coerce religious observance. I agree that the separation of church and state should never be misused to exclude religious people or their convictions from public life.

My concern arises from the report's suggestion that church and state strengthen and support one another and that religious liberty may be understood as a bridge between them. Although the report also recognizes that church and state have distinct roles, I respectfully ask the Commission to preserve a clear institutional boundary between civil and religious authority. *(Draft Report at 21, 43, 179.)*

Religious liberty has been one of the greatest blessings and strengths of the United States. This nation became a refuge for many who desired to worship God according to conscience, free from religious persecution and civil compulsion. America's contribution to religious liberty has not been the government's endorsement of religion, but its protection of every person's freedom to believe and worship according to conscience.

By separation, I do not mean that people of faith should be excluded from public office, political life, or public discussion. My concern is not with religious people serving in government, but with civil government exercising religious authority.

Civil government and the church naturally have distinct responsibilities. Government preserves civil order, protects equal rights, and restrains injury between persons. The church teaches truth, proclaims the gospel, serves others, and appeals to the conscience. Keeping these responsibilities distinct protects both institutions and preserves liberty of conscience.

Christ recognized this distinction when He spoke of the things belonging to Caesar and the things belonging to God. Matters of worship, faith, and duty toward God belong to the individual conscience and should not be directed or enforced by the state.

As a Bible-believing seventh-day Sabbath keeper, I value religious liberty as a God-given right—not only for those who share my beliefs, but for every person. Genuine faith must be voluntary. It must be received through conviction and persuasion, never produced through political influence or civil compulsion.

The history of seventh-day Sabbath keepers gives me particular reason for concern. During the late nineteenth century, Seventh-day Adventists who observed Saturday as the biblical Sabbath were prosecuted under Sunday blue laws for performing ordinary work on Sunday, which they regarded as a common working day. Some were fined or imprisoned, and some were sentenced to chain-gang labor.

Those believers were not attempting to compel others to accept their faith or observe their Sabbath. They were simply seeking the freedom to obey God according to conscience while allowing others the same freedom. Their experience shows how quickly conscientious minorities can lose their liberty when civil government requires conformity to a religious observance.

The separation of church and state is not hostility toward religion. Properly understood, it protects religion from civil control and protects every person from religious coercion. It allows faith to flourish through truth, service, persuasion, and voluntary conviction rather than through the power of the state.

I therefore respectfully ask the Commission to preserve and clearly affirm the constitutional boundaries between civil and religious authority. Please protect liberty of conscience equally for people of all faiths and for those who profess no religion. Religious liberty cannot remain secure unless it belongs to everyone.

My sincere hope is that the Commission will preserve the freedom that has allowed religion to flourish without civil control and every person to worship according to conscience.

Respectfully submitted,

From: Terry Tallos <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:01:17 -0400
Importance: Normal

As a citizen and a person of faith, I am deeply troubled by the Commission's proposal to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." This wall was built by believers to keep the church free, not by secularists to restrict religion. A bridge opens the door for government funding and political influence, forcing churches to compete for grants and answer to politicians instead of to God. History demonstrates that the blending of church and state leads to tyranny and persecution. I urge you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken this separation, specifically using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment. When churches engage in partisan politics or accept government funding, they inherit political corruption. Separation protects faith, which is precisely why religion has remained strong in our country.

Please maintain the separation of church and state - this has been the secret of Americas prosperity all these years. If the principles of religious freedom are abandoned this will open the floodgates of intolerance and tyranny. Rhode Island was founded by Roger Williams who was forced to flee in the dead of winter because of his religious views, including his belief that church and civil government should remain separate. Rhode Island became an early model of religious liberty, and those principles later influenced the American commitment to religious freedom and the separation of church and state.

From: alvin gottfried <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious freedom in America
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:02:52 -0400
Importance: Normal

To all you very important people who are part of this committee I thank you for your service and dedication. I am very concerned to hear that there is an attitude towards the principle of separation of church and state calling it a lie. This is no lie. This principle has served our country well for 250 years. Please do not do anything to change it Thankyou. Alvin Gottfried

From: sally hafner <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comments
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:03:39 -0400
Importance: Normal

I want to express my disagreement with the proposed to take away the separation of church and state. The first amendment separates the church from state. The separation allows the religion to flourish. A person should be able to practice as their conscience dictates. When the religion is given power of the state to enforce its rules it does not improve the religious life of a person. Education and choice is the loving way to change a person.
Look at history when church and state unite. It comes to persecution of people who believe differently. Example Roger Williams, the pilgrims. The Dark Ages
God gives us the choice to follow Him or not. He has set a good example. Sincerely Sally J Hafner
Sent from my iPhone

From: Rick Gearhart <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTe- Establishment Clause – Gregory Gearhart
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:03:45 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a private citizen from Coos Bay, Oregon, who cares deeply about both halves of the First Amendment's promise on religion: that government will establish none, and that it will burden no one's free exercise of their own. I believe a person must come to Christ freely, of his own will, and that any law dictating how a person must worship violates that basic principle. This country was blessed because it granted its citizens genuine religious freedom, not because it forced religion upon them. We have largely turned our back on God as a nation, but the answer to that is never coercion. History shows what happens to nations that try to compel worship — they do not prosper by it, they decline. I ask the Commission to keep that history in view.

There is a deeper reason government has no business in religion than a mere reading of one clause: no person can delegate to government a power he does not himself possess. Our whole system rests on the idea that government's just powers come from the consent of the governed — powers the people hand over. But no one can hand over his relationship with God. I can authorize someone to manage my property; I cannot authorize anyone to believe for me or answer for my soul. Since that power was never mine to give, it was never government's to receive. And the logic cuts both ways: no government will ever stand before the judgment seat of Christ to answer for its citizens' souls, so no government can rightly claim jurisdiction over them. The First Amendment did not invent this boundary. It simply recorded a limit that was already there.

I would also urge the Commission to resist the notion that a law favoring religion is safer than one restricting it. Any law touching worship must define which worship counts, and that definition excludes as much as it includes. Even those it favors no longer practice their faith freely — they practice it by permission, subject to revision whenever the political winds change. I would ask believers who welcome government endorsement of their faith to consider that they are gambling with a precedent they will not always control. The same machinery that blesses their convictions today can just as easily be turned against them tomorrow, under a different majority.

Finally, I do not believe majority opinion can settle questions of conscience. If a vote can grant religious liberty, a vote can revoke it, which means it was never truly a right, only a permission on loan. Rights, as our founding tradition holds, are inherent, given by the Creator, and it is precisely for that reason placed beyond the reach of election returns. Popular government exists to protect the individual and the minority from the majority, not to hand the majority a tool for enforcing belief. However many Americans might favor some religious measure, the people, however numerous, have no right to invade another's relationship to God.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Gregory Gearhart
Coos Bay, Oregon

From: Mark Lehto <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:04:14 -0400
Importance: Normal

I dont know why you guys think church and state are not separate. That is the reason that people left the countries to come to America. When the church tells the state how to govern this country, the people lose their rights to worship according to their consciences. I worship on Saturday, according to Genesis when God made the Sabbath and when God gave the ten commandments on Mt Sinai. You guys will force everyone to worship on Sunday and I guess I will be persecuted for not following yours laws. Thanks Mark Lehto

From: SuedHelmo <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:09:01 -0400
Importance: Normal

To Whom This May Concern:

I believe that God never intended that government should have a power to tell his people how or when to worship. Religious freedom is just that, freedom to worship Jesus as it was intended.
Please let there be separation of church and state.

From: David Beard <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Unconstitutional
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:09:34 -0400
Importance: Normal

As Americans we are for freedom from forced worship or religious tests as stated in the first and 14th Amendments. Do not allow labor laws to force businesses to pay overtime wages for Sunday work or force stores to close on Sundays.
This must be revealed through the mainstream media to notify US citizens of proposed changes.

David Beard

From: Love ly <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – JD
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:10:47 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I write to you today with a humble and prayerful heart. As a Christian, I believe that religious liberty is one of God's greatest gifts to humanity because genuine faith can never be compelled. Love, worship, and obedience to God must always be freely chosen, not influenced by political power or government authority.

Throughout history, whenever church and state have become intertwined, both have suffered. However, it is the religious entity that faces undue hardship and in some cases persecution.

Governments have too often determined religious doctrine, while faith communities have become entangled with political interests. The result has rarely strengthened religion. Instead, it has weakened the freedom of conscience that allows faith to flourish.

As a believer, I do not ask the government to advance my faith. I ask that it continue to protect the freedom of every individual to seek God according to the convictions of their own conscience. The separation of church and state has never been an enemy of religion. Rather, it has been one of the greatest safeguards for authentic faith, allowing people of every belief to worship or not worship without coercion or favoritism.

I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve these protections and to carefully reconsider recommendations that would blur the distinction between religious institutions and governmental authority. Our nation is strongest when it protects the conscience of every citizen equally, regardless of their faith tradition. And that is why religious freedom is so important and integral to the foundation of this nation which our Founding Fathers recognized.

My plea is motivated by the hope that future generations will continue to enjoy the same religious liberty that has allowed countless people, including my own faith community, to worship freely without any governmental influence. May we never take that freedom for granted.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your willingness to consider the voices of the American people.

Respectfully,

Jeavanie D.
Atlanta, GA

From: Danny Kwon <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:13:14 -0400
Importance: Normal

I understand that the religious liberty commission is discussing church and state and wanted to express my concerns.
I believe in separation of church and state.
The government should strictly follow the principles of the first amendment and not blur this distinction by financially supporting or creating special cases for specific religious groups.

Thank you for your hearing my concerns.
Daniel Kwon, MD

From: L CBB <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:13:21 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: From_Separation_to_Partnership_-_Addressing_the_Religious_Liberty_Commission.pdf

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DOJ-RLC Comment-012318

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DOJ-RLC Comment-012319

How the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Redefines Religious Liberty

The Question Before America- Introduction

For more than two centuries, the United States has understood religious liberty to rest upon a simple but profound principle. Thomas Jefferson expressed it in his famous letter to the Danbury Baptist Association:

*"Believing with you that religion is a matter which **lies solely between Man & his God**, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach **actions only, & NOT OPINIONS**."*

President Donald Trump receives the report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission at the White House. This booklet examines the Commission's recommendations in eradicating the term "separation of church and state".

Those words captured the historic American understanding of liberty of conscience. Civil government was ordained by God, but its authority was deliberately limited. It was entrusted with the responsibility of preserving justice, protecting life, and maintaining civil order. It was **not** entrusted with authority over faith, worship, or the conscience.

The issue has never been whether government is ordained by God. Scripture plainly teaches that it is. The issue has always been where God said government must stop.

The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission affirms the importance of religion and rightly recognizes the vital role faith has played in the history of the United States. Yet its recommendations represent a significant shift in emphasis. Rather than defining religious liberty primarily by the constitutional limits placed upon civil government, the Commission encourages a closer institutional relationship between

DOJ-RLC Comment-012320

government and religion. It proposes replacing the familiar "wall of separation" with a "bridge" between church and state.

This booklet argues that the question before America is not whether religion should influence society. It should. Nor is the question whether government should protect the free exercise of religion. It must.

The question is whether civil government should move beyond protecting religious liberty and begin fostering an institutional partnership with religion.

That question reaches far beyond constitutional interpretation. It touches the biblical distinction Christ established between His kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. It shaped the convictions of America's founders, influenced the framing of the First Amendment, and ultimately points forward to the final conflict over worship described in Bible prophecy.

The pages that follow examine that question from three perspectives—Scripture, history, and the Constitution, to determine whether America's historic understanding of liberty of conscience is being preserved or redefined.

The conscience is not outside God's government—it is outside Caesar's.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012321

Chapter One - Liberty of Conscience Begins with God

Religious liberty is not first a constitutional principle. **It is a biblical principle.**

Long before legislatures enacted laws, before nations drafted constitutions, and before courts interpreted rights, God established the proper relationship between His kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. The distinction between civil authority and the conscience did not originate with Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Roger Williams, or any other statesman. It originated with Jesus Christ.

One of the clearest statements ever made concerning that distinction occurred while Jesus stood before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Accused of claiming to be a king, Jesus answered:

"My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence." (John 18:36)

This declaration establishes the foundation upon which every discussion of religious liberty must rest. Christ was not denying the legitimacy of civil government. He was defining its jurisdiction.

In fact, only a few verses later Jesus acknowledged that Pilate's authority had been given "from above" (John 19:11). Civil government has a legitimate place within God's order. Yet Christ made it unmistakably clear that His kingdom operates upon entirely different principles.

Earthly governments preserve civil order. They enact laws, punish crime, defend innocent life, and bear the sword against evildoers. Christ's kingdom advances in another way. It governs not by civil force, but by truth, conviction, love, and the work of the Holy Spirit upon the conscience. It never compels genuine faith by civil power.

Jesus explained the difference in a single sentence:

DOJ-RLC Comment-012322

"If My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight."

Earthly kingdoms ultimately rely upon force to maintain their authority. Christ's kingdom does not. Faith produced by coercion is not faith at all. A government may compel outward actions, but it cannot produce love for God. It may punish crime, but it cannot create holiness. It may command attendance, but it cannot command worship. Worship belongs to another kingdom.

Christ's words establish the biblical foundation of liberty of conscience. His kingdom does not spread by the sword of Caesar but by the power of truth working upon willing hearts.

The Two Jurisdictions
Jesus reinforced this principle when asked whether taxes should be paid to Caesar. Holding up a coin, He answered:

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21)

With these few words, Christ established two distinct jurisdictions. Caesar possesses legitimate authority. God possesses supreme authority. The question is not whether government has authority. Scripture plainly teaches that it does. The question is **what authority God has entrusted to it.**

Worship belongs to God. Faith belongs to God. Conscience belongs to God. No earthly ruler may rightfully claim what belongs exclusively to the Creator. Whenever civil government attempts to prescribe doctrine, direct worship, or compel religious belief, it reaches beyond the authority God has granted it. Those things belong to **God's jurisdiction** alone.

God Ordained Civil Government
The Bible does not teach anarchy. The Apostle Paul wrote:

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"For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." (Romans 13:1)

Civil government is God's servant for the preservation of society. Paul explains that rulers are appointed to reward those who do good and punish those who do evil. They "bear not the sword in vain," for they are "the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:4).

The sword is a civil instrument. It exists to restrain violence, protect innocent life, punish crime, and preserve public order. It was never given to enforce faith, determine doctrine, compel worship, or govern the conscience. God entrusted civil rulers with authority over civil matters—not over the conscience.

Romans 13 establishes both the authority and the limits of civil government. The magistrate bears the sword to preserve civil order and punish those who commit outward acts of evil. Yet nowhere does Scripture authorize civil government to compel worship, prescribe doctrine, or govern the heart. Those belong to God's jurisdiction alone. Civil rulers judge outward conduct; God alone judges the heart.

This distinction is essential. Not every sin falls within the jurisdiction of civil government. God condemns pride, covetousness, lust, hatred, envy, unbelief, idolatry, and every sinful thought of the heart. These are violations of God's moral law, yet they are not crimes that the civil magistrate is authorized to punish. No government can imprison a man for coveting his neighbor's house, fine him for pride, or sentence him for hatred in his heart. These sins are real, and God will judge them, but He has reserved that judgment to Himself.

Civil government is ordained to punish outward acts that violate the rights and safety of others—murder, theft, fraud, violence, and similar

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offenses. It was never commissioned to enforce the whole of God's moral law. If it were, the magistrate would be required to punish every violation of the Ten Commandments, including idolatry, unbelief, covetousness, and every sinful desire of the heart. Furthermore, with the punishment of death. We would all be guilty. (Romans 3:19) Scripture gives no such authority.

This is the distinction of jurisdiction. God ordained civil government to restrain outward acts that disturb the peace and safety of society. He never entrusted it with authority over worship, faith, repentance, doctrine, or the conscience. Those remain under His government alone.

The Limits of Civil Authority

The apostles themselves recognized this distinction. When commanded by the Jewish authorities to stop preaching Christ, Peter answered:

"We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

Peter did not deny the legitimacy of civil government, nor did he call for rebellion. He simply recognized that civil authority has limits. Whenever earthly rulers command what God forbids, or forbid what God commands, the jurisdiction of Caesar has ended and the jurisdiction of God remains supreme.

This is the very essence of liberty of conscience. No government possesses the authority to stand between God and the individual soul.

Faith Cannot Be Forced

Throughout Scripture, God appeals to mankind through persuasion rather than coercion.

Moses pleaded: *"I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life."* (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Joshua challenged Israel: *"Choose you this day whom ye will serve."* (Joshua 24:15)

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Paul wrote: *"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* (Romans 10:17)

Again he declared: *"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men."* (2 Corinthians 5:11)

The biblical pattern is unmistakable. God reveals truth. He invites. He warns. He pleads. He persuades. He never produces genuine worship through civil compulsion. If the Almighty Himself does not force the conscience, no earthly government has the right to do so.

Conclusion

The Scriptures establish two governments, each ordained by God for a distinct purpose. Civil government exists to preserve justice, punish wrongdoing, and protect society. It governs outward conduct. Christ's kingdom governs the heart, transforming the conscience through truth, love, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Confusing these two jurisdictions has produced some of the darkest chapters in human history. Whenever the church has sought the sword of the state, or the state has assumed authority over the conscience, liberty has suffered and religion has been corrupted. The chapters that follow will demonstrate how this biblical principle profoundly influenced the development of religious liberty in America, shaped the thinking of the nation's founders, and remains the defining issue in the ongoing debate over the proper relationship between church and state.

Biblical religious liberty is therefore far more than a constitutional principle. It is a divine principle established by Christ Himself.

Civil government is ordained by God, but it was never ordained to govern the conscience. The conscience belongs to God. Caesar has no rightful claim upon it.

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Chapter 2 - America's Founders Recognized the Limits of Civil Government

The principle of liberty of conscience did not begin with America's founders. As we saw in the previous chapter, it began with Jesus Christ Himself, who distinguished His kingdom from the kingdoms of this world and taught that what belongs to God must never be claimed by Caesar.

The founders of the United States did not invent this principle. Rather, they recognized it after centuries of painful experience and sought to preserve it in the constitutional system they established.

The American experiment in religious liberty was born from HISTORY For centuries, Europe witnessed repeated attempts to enforce religious conformity through civil power. Kings legislated doctrine. Magistrates enforced religious decrees. Churches relied upon the sword of the state to preserve orthodoxy, while governments relied upon religious institutions to strengthen political authority.

The result was not religious unity. It was persecution, imprisonment, confiscation of property, exile, torture, and death. America's founders knew this history well, and they were determined not to repeat it.

Roger Williams

Long before the American Revolution, Roger Williams recognized the danger of uniting church and state. A Puritan minister in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Williams believed that civil government had no authority over matters of faith and conscience. His convictions brought him into direct conflict with the colony's leaders, who believed the civil magistrate should help

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preserve religious uniformity. In 1635, Williams was banished from Massachusetts because of these convictions.

After establishing the colony of Rhode Island, he sought to build a society where liberty of conscience would be protected and civil government would exercise no authority over worship.

Describing the proper relationship between church and state, Williams wrote of: *"...the hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wilderness of the world."*

Williams' concern was not to protect the government from religion. It was to protect the church from the corrupting influence of civil power. He understood that once the civil magistrate entered the affairs of religion, both institutions would suffer. The church would gradually lose its spiritual independence, while the state would become entangled in matters that belonged to God alone.

Isaac Backus

A century later, Baptist minister Isaac Backus continued the same argument. Opposing the establishment of religion by civil government, he wrote:
"God has appointed two kinds of government in the world, which are in their nature and ought never to be confounded together."

Backus understood what Christ had taught centuries earlier. God ordained civil government to preserve justice and order, but He never gave it authority over faith or worship. To confuse those two governments was to violate the jurisdiction God Himself had established.

The language differs from Christ's teaching about rendering unto Caesar and unto God, but the principle is identical. There are two governments, two jurisdictions, and each must remain within the sphere God has assigned it.

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John Leland
John Leland, who greatly influenced James Madison regarding the first amendment carried this principle even further. A close friend of James Madison and an influential Baptist minister during the debates surrounding the Constitution, Leland insisted that liberty of conscience was more than mere toleration.

He wrote: *"The liberty I contend for is more than toleration. The very idea of toleration is despicable."*

Leland understood that toleration assumes government possesses authority over religion and merely chooses not to exercise it. Liberty of conscience rests upon an entirely different foundation. Government has no rightful jurisdiction over the conscience in the first place.

Leland also warned: *"The notion of a Christian commonwealth should be exploded forever."*

He was not arguing against Christianity influencing society. Rather, he rejected the idea that civil government should assume responsibility for enforcing Christianity.

Thomas Jefferson
Perhaps no founder expressed this principle more clearly than Thomas Jefferson. Writing to the Danbury Baptist Association on January 1, 1802, Jefferson declared:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions."

Jefferson did not merely defend religious tolerance. He identified the proper jurisdiction of civil government. Government may regulate actions affecting civil society, but it has no jurisdiction over faith, worship, or conscience. That authority belongs to God alone.

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Years earlier, Jefferson reflected upon Europe's history with these sobering words:
"Millions of innocent men, women, and children... have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch toward uniformity."

His conclusion was unmistakable. Civil force had failed to produce genuine faith. Instead, it had produced centuries of suffering.

James Madison
James Madison shared the same conviction. Often called the "Father of the Constitution," he became one of America's strongest defenders of liberty of conscience. Reflecting upon Europe's long history of religious persecution, Madison wrote:
"The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."

Madison was not speaking in the abstract. He was looking back upon centuries in which civil governments enforced religious conformity through the power of the state. Throughout much of the Middle Ages and beyond, church and civil authorities worked together to suppress what they regarded as heresy. The result was imprisonment, torture, confiscation of property, exile, and death.

Both Madison and Jefferson reached the same conclusion. Civil force cannot produce genuine faith. Instead of preserving religion, it corrupts both the church and the state. Whether expressed as "separation," "liberty of conscience," or the "free exercise" of religion, the principle remained the same. Civil government was never intended to govern religion. Its duty is to protect every person's liberty to worship God—or to decline worship—according to the dictates of conscience, without coercion from the state.

George Washington
America's first president expressed the practical result of these principles in his famous letter to the Hebrew Congregation at Newport

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in 1790:
"The Government of the United States... gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."

Washington did not speak merely of toleration. He envisioned a nation in which citizens of every faith could worship freely because government neither established religion nor persecuted those who differed.

The Constitution would not create religious liberty. Rather, it would protect the liberty of conscience that belongs to every person as a gift from God.

The First Amendment
These principles found expression in the First Amendment to the Constitution:
"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

Notice that the Amendment accomplishes two complementary purposes. First, it prevents the civil government from establishing religion. Second, it protects the free exercise of religion. These are not competing ideas, they are inseparable. Government refrains from exercising authority over religion precisely so that religion may remain free.

The freedom of the church depends upon the restraint of the state.

Is "Separation of Church and State" in the Constitution?
One objection frequently raised today is that the phrase "separation of church and state" never appears in the Constitution. That observation is correct. The exact phrase is not found in the Constitution. But the question is not whether Jefferson's particular wording appears. The question is whether the principle appears.

The First Amendment declares:

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"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

Those words establish two complementary principles. Civil government may not establish religion, and it may not interfere with the free exercise of religion. Thomas Jefferson later described this constitutional arrangement as building **"a wall of separation between Church & State."** He was not inventing a new constitutional doctrine. He was describing the practical effect of the First Amendment.

Jefferson was not alone. James Madison defended the same principle. Roger Williams described a hedge or wall separating the church from the wilderness of the world. Isaac Backus spoke of two governments that "ought never to be confounded together." John Leland insisted that government possesses no rightful authority over the conscience. Though they expressed the idea differently, they defended the same constitutional principle: **civil government possesses no jurisdiction over religion because the conscience belongs to God.**

The issue, therefore, is not whether Jefferson's particular phrase appears in the Constitution. The issue is whether the Constitution limits civil government in matters of religion.

It plainly does.

Protecting Both Church and State

One of the greatest misunderstandings surrounding the phrase *"separation of church and state"* is the assumption that it was designed either to exclude religion from public life or merely to protect government from religious influence. The founders understood the issue differently. They believed that God had ordained both civil government and the church, but had entrusted each with a different jurisdiction.

History had repeatedly demonstrated the danger of confusing those jurisdictions. Whenever the church sought the power of the state, it gained political influence but lost its spiritual independence. Whenever

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the state assumed authority over religion, it became entangled in matters of faith and conscience that God had never entrusted to it. The result was not liberty, but persecution.

Roger Williams sought to preserve the church from the corrupting influence of civil power. Isaac Backus distinguished the two governments that God had ordained and insisted they must never be confounded. John Leland rejected mere toleration because he believed government possessed no rightful authority over the conscience. Thomas Jefferson limited the legitimate powers of government to "actions only, and not opinions." James Madison sought to spare America the religious bloodshed that had soaked the soil of Europe for centuries. George Washington envisioned a nation that would "give to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."

Though each expressed the principle in different language, they defended the same fundamental truth: civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience. By keeping church and state within their God-given spheres, they sought to preserve the independence of both institutions. The church would remain free to proclaim truth without relying upon civil power, and the government would remain free from assuming authority over worship, doctrine, or faith. In protecting liberty of conscience, they protected both the church and the state from exercising authority that belonged only to God.

Conclusion

America's founders did not establish liberty of conscience because they distrusted religion. They established it because they understood both Scripture and history. They recognized that Christ's kingdom advances through truth rather than force, and they deliberately limited the jurisdiction of civil government to preserve that principle.

For nearly 250 years, this understanding of liberty of conscience has distinguished the United States from the systems that preceded it. The question now before the nation is whether that historic understanding will be preserved, or fundamentally redefined.

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Chapter 3 -Religious Liberty Redefined

"The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." — Thomas Jefferson

A New Direction
The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission was established to examine the state of religious liberty in America and recommend ways to strengthen it. At first glance, many of its recommendations appear commendable. The report affirms the importance of religion, recognizes the indispensable role faith has played throughout American history, and calls for protecting the free exercise of religion. Every Christian should welcome sincere efforts to preserve the freedom to worship God according to the dictates of conscience.

The question before us, however, is not whether religious liberty should be protected. The question is **how the Commission defines religious liberty.** Throughout history, liberty has seldom disappeared by being openly abolished. More often it has been redefined until the original principle is scarcely recognized.

For nearly 250 years, the American understanding of religious liberty rested upon a simple constitutional principle: **civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience.** Government protected religious liberty precisely because it limited its own authority. The Commission proposes a different emphasis.

Rather than focusing primarily upon the constitutional limits of civil authority, the report repeatedly encourages a closer relationship between government and religious institutions. That shift becomes especially clear in its discussion of the historic concept of the separation of church and state.

The report states:
"The concept of a 'wall of separation between church and state' can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another... Perhaps a better analogy is that religious liberty acts as a bridge between church and state."

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This statement deserves careful consideration because metaphors reveal assumptions. A wall establishes a boundary. A bridge establishes a connection. A wall limits jurisdiction. A bridge facilitates cooperation. Whether one prefers Jefferson's terminology or another expression, the historic American principle remained the same: civil government protects religious liberty by recognizing the limits of its own authority. The Commission's proposed metaphor points in a different direction.

From Protection to Partnership

That change in emphasis is reflected throughout the Commission's report. It recommends expanded cooperation with faith-based organizations, broader opportunities for religious organizations to receive government funding, repeal of the Johnson Amendment, additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life, the creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty, and even points to historical examples of governmental encouragement of Sabbath observance as positive precedents.

Each recommendation may be evaluated on its own merits. Taken together, however, they reveal a consistent shift in emphasis. For nearly two and a half centuries, America's understanding of religious liberty sought to preserve liberty of conscience by carefully limiting the jurisdiction of civil government in matters of religion. The Commission increasingly presents religious liberty not simply as protection from governmental interference, but as a framework for closer institutional cooperation between government and religion.

That distinction is more significant than it first appears. The historic American question was, "Where has God placed the limits of civil authority?" The Commission increasingly asks, "How can government and religion work together to strengthen society?" Those are fundamentally different questions. One preserves liberty by recognizing constitutional limits. The other encourages a closer institutional relationship between government and religion.

History demonstrates why that distinction matters. Once government becomes a partner with religion, it cannot avoid making religious

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judgments. It must determine which organizations qualify for public support, which religious practices deserve official recognition, and where the limits are to be drawn. The Commission's favorable reference to Abraham Lincoln's order encouraging Sabbath observance illustrates how quickly these questions move from protecting religious liberty to government encouraging religious practice. Whether future generations apply that principle more broadly, including questions surrounding Sunday observance, is a question Americans should not dismiss lightly.

Whether that shift ultimately strengthens religious liberty or gradually expands the role of civil government in religious affairs is the central question examined throughout this booklet.

Public Religion Is Not the Issue

At this point an important clarification is necessary. Nothing in this discussion suggests that religion should be confined to private life. Scripture teaches the opposite. Jesus preached publicly. The apostles preached publicly. The prophets addressed kings. Christians are called to proclaim the gospel, defend truth, care for the poor, pursue justice, and bear witness before rulers and nations.

The issue has never been whether religion should influence society. The issue is whether civil government should become institutionally involved in religion. Those are fundamentally different questions. A free church should influence the nation through persuasion, preaching, and faithful witness. A constitutional government should protect that freedom without assuming authority over religion itself.

The Question of Jurisdiction

Ultimately, every discussion concerning religious liberty returns to a single question:

What authority has God entrusted to civil government?

Scripture answers that question clearly. Civil government exists to preserve order, protect life, restrain violence, and punish crime. Worship, doctrine, faith, and conscience belong to another jurisdiction, and it is the duty of the civil government to protect the freedom of it.

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History repeatedly demonstrates what happens when that distinction is forgotten. Governments that begin by supporting religion eventually find themselves deciding religious questions. Which beliefs qualify for protection? Which religious organizations deserve public support? Which doctrines fall outside acceptable limits? Who determines what constitutes heresy? These questions are unavoidable whenever civil authority crosses into matters of conscience.

That is precisely the danger America's founders sought to prevent.

Why This Matters

The issue before America is therefore much larger than a disagreement over a metaphor. The question is whether the constitutional principle that protected liberty of conscience is being quietly redefined.

Replacing a wall with a bridge may sound harmless, but history teaches that liberty is rarely lost in a single dramatic moment. More often it is surrendered gradually, one definition at a time, one principle at a time, until the original safeguards are scarcely recognized.

If America's understanding of religious liberty shifts from protecting the conscience by limiting civil jurisdiction to encouraging institutional alliance between government and religion, then America has begun moving away from the constitutional principles that distinguished it from the Old World.

Before determining whether that shift represents progress or departure, we must first recognize that history itself presents two very different understandings of religious liberty. One sought to preserve liberty by limiting the authority of civil government in matters of religion. The other envisioned a closer relationship between civil authority and religious truth. Understanding those two models is essential before evaluating the direction America is now taking.

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Chapter 4 -Two Competing Historical Understandings of Religious Liberty

By the close of the eighteenth century, the United States had embraced a principle that distinguished it from nearly every nation in the world. Civil government would possess no jurisdiction over the conscience. Religion would neither be established by Congress nor prohibited by Congress, and the free exercise of religion would be protected because the conscience belonged to God alone.

This understanding did not arise in a vacuum. It emerged after centuries of conflict over the relationship between civil government and religion. To appreciate the significance of America's constitutional system, it is necessary to compare it with another historical understanding of religious liberty that prevailed throughout much of Europe for centuries. This comparison is not intended to criticize individuals or denominations. It is simply an examination of two different historical models.

The American Model

The American understanding of religious liberty rested upon one fundamental principle: **civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience.** As we have seen, this conviction was championed by Roger Williams, Isaac Backus, John Leland, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and ultimately embodied in the First Amendment. Though each expressed the principle differently, they agreed that the authority of civil government reached only its proper sphere.

Thomas Jefferson summarized that principle with remarkable clarity when he wrote:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions."

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Jefferson's distinction is both simple and profound. Government reaches actions, not opinions, worship, or conscience. Those belong to God alone.

James Madison expressed the same concern when reflecting upon the religious wars that had devastated Europe:
"The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."

These convictions found constitutional expression in the First Amendment, which prohibited Congress from establishing religion while protecting its free exercise. Under this model, religion remained free because civil government remained limited. The state's responsibility was not to determine religious truth but to protect every citizen's liberty of conscience.

The Historical Papal Model
For many centuries, the relationship between church and civil government developed differently throughout much of Catholic Europe. Rather than treating religion solely as a matter beyond civil jurisdiction, influential papal documents taught that civil society owed duties toward the true religion.

Pope Gregory XVI, writing in *Mirari Vos* (1832), rejected unrestricted liberty of conscience in some of the strongest language of the nineteenth century. Referring to what he viewed as religious indifferentism, he wrote:

"From this poisoned source of indifferentism flows that absurd and erroneous proposition, or rather delirium, that liberty of conscience must be asserted and vindicated for everyone."

Pope Pius IX reaffirmed the same position in *Quanta Cura* (1864), describing liberty of conscience as **"a most pestilential error."**

Pope Leo XIII continued this line of thought in *Libertas* (1888), writing:

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"Let us examine that liberty in individuals which is so opposed to the virtue of religion... A liberty such as we have described... is no liberty, but is degradation."

These statements did not deny the importance of religion. Rather, they reflected a different understanding of the relationship between civil authority and religious truth. Whereas Jefferson argued that religion lies solely between man and God, these papal documents maintained that civil society possesses obligations toward what it understands to be the true religion.

Civil Government and Religious Truth

The difference between these two systems extended beyond abstract principles. Throughout much of European history, civil rulers frequently assisted ecclesiastical authorities in suppressing heresy, enforcing religious conformity, and protecting what was regarded as the true faith. Likewise, church authorities often appealed to civil rulers to carry out judgments that the Church itself could not enforce through spiritual authority alone.

These arrangements varied considerably across countries and centuries, and their legal details changed over time. Nevertheless, they reflected a broader understanding that civil government and ecclesiastical authority could cooperate in matters concerning religion.

By contrast, the American constitutional model deliberately denied civil government jurisdiction over religious doctrine while protecting the liberty of every individual's conscience. The distinction was not merely practical. It represented two fundamentally different understandings of the relationship between church and state.

Two Different Starting Points

Although both systems acknowledged the importance of religion, they began from fundamentally different assumptions.

The American system asked, **What authority has God withheld from civil government?** Its answer was straightforward: **the conscience.** Civil

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government possesses legitimate authority over civil society, but worship, faith, and doctrine remain under God's jurisdiction alone.

The historical European model more often asked, **What duties does civil government owe toward the true religion?** Its answer generally included some form of cooperation between civil authority and religious truth as understood by the Church. Those different starting points produced two distinct understandings of religious liberty.

Why This Comparison Matters

The purpose of this chapter has not been to determine which historical model was correct. It has simply been to establish that two very different understandings of religious liberty existed. One limited civil government to its God-ordained jurisdiction and sought to protect liberty of conscience by restricting governmental authority.

Recognizing that distinction is essential before examining more recent developments. If America's understanding of religious liberty has remained unchanged, then contemporary discussions should reflect the same constitutional limits recognized by the founders. If, however, that understanding has changed, Americans should carefully examine how, why, and with what consequences.

If these two historical models differed so fundamentally, an obvious question arises: Has that difference disappeared, or has it simply been redefined?

To answer that question, we must examine the modern understanding of religious liberty and ask whether it represents a continuation of America's constitutional tradition, a development within Catholic thought, or the emergence of an entirely new relationship between church and state.

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Chapter 5- Vatican II and the Modern Understanding of Religious Liberty

The previous chapter demonstrated that two distinct historical understandings of religious liberty existed for centuries. America's founders understood liberty of conscience to mean that civil government possessed no jurisdiction over matters of faith and worship. Religion belonged to God, while government exercised authority only over civil affairs.

Historical Roman Catholic teaching approached the question differently. As we have seen, Popes Gregory XVI, Pius IX, and Leo XIII each criticized principles associated with unrestricted liberty of conscience and liberty of worship as they were understood in nineteenth-century liberal thought. That historical distinction raises an obvious question: **Did the Roman Catholic Church change its teaching on religious liberty?**

Most Catholics today answer that question by pointing to the Second Vatican Council.

Vatican II and *Dignitatis Humanae*
Between 1962 and 1965, the Roman Catholic Church convened the Second Vatican Council. Among its sixteen major documents was *Dignitatis Humanae* ("Declaration on Religious Freedom"), a document devoted entirely to the subject of religious liberty.

Its opening declaration states:
"The human person has a right to religious freedom."

The document goes on to explain that religious freedom consists in immunity from coercion by individuals, social groups, or civil authority in matters of religion.

To many readers, these statements sound remarkably similar to principles long embraced within the American constitutional tradition. At first glance, one might naturally conclude that the historical debate has been resolved. Yet the matter is more complex than it first appears.

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Development Rather Than Contradiction?
The principal debate is not primarily between Protestants and Catholics. It exists within Catholic theology itself.

Catholic theologians generally reject the suggestion that Vatican II contradicted earlier papal teaching. Instead, they argue that doctrine developed. According to Catholic theology, divine truth does not change, but the Church's understanding and application of revealed truth may develop over time. *Dignitatis Humanae* is therefore understood by Catholic scholars not as a rejection of Gregory XVI, Pius IX, or Leo XIII, but as a legitimate development of earlier teaching.

Whether one agrees with that explanation or not, the purpose of this booklet is not to resolve an internal theological debate. It is simply to recognize that the discussion exists.

Public Religion and the Authority to Define Truth
That question becomes especially relevant because Bishop Robert Barron, a member of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, frequently presents Vatican II as one of the great achievements of modern Catholicism. Barron has also argued that religion must not be reduced to merely private belief, stating:
"If you marginalized and privatized religion, democracy is in danger... That's deadly to our democracy."

In the historic Roman Catholic understanding, religion is not merely a matter of private judgment. Religious truth is authoritatively defined by the teaching office of the Church, and the individual conscience is expected to be formed by and submit to that established doctrine rather than independently determining matters of faith. Barron's concern should be understood within that theological tradition.

The American understanding of liberty of conscience begins from a different premise. The individual stands accountable to God. Thomas Jefferson wrote that religion "lies solely between Man & his God," and that the legitimate powers of government reach "actions only, and not

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opinions." Liberty of conscience therefore protects every individual from civil coercion because the conscience answers ultimately to God rather than to the civil magistrate.

If, however, religious truth is authoritatively defined by the Church, then liberty of conscience cannot simply mean that every individual is free to determine truth for himself. *The disagreement is therefore not over the importance of religion, but over the source of religious authority.*

That difference explains why Popes Gregory XVI, Pius IX, and Leo XIII rejected unrestricted liberty of conscience and liberty of worship. Their concern was not merely that religion remain public, but that religious truth not be reduced to private or individual opinion.

The question before America, therefore, is not whether religion should influence society. It always has. The question is whether liberty of conscience belongs to the individual before God, or whether civil society should increasingly recognize and support an established understanding of religious truth.

Looking Ahead

If these two understandings of religious liberty begin from different assumptions about authority, then an important constitutional question follows.

When the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission speaks of strengthening religious liberty, which understanding is it preserving?

Is it preserving the founders' conviction that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience?

Or is it moving toward a closer relationship between civil government and an established understanding of religious truth?

That is the question we now examine.

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Chapter 6 - Does the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Preserve America's Understanding of Religious Liberty?

The previous chapters have established four important principles. First, Scripture teaches that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience. Second, America's founders deliberately incorporated that principle into the Constitution after witnessing centuries of persecution produced by the union of church and state. Third, history has revealed two distinct understandings of religious liberty—one beginning with the liberty of the individual conscience before God, the other beginning with an established understanding of religious truth. Finally, we have seen that the modern discussion of religious liberty cannot be understood apart from this deeper question:

Who possesses authority to define religious truth?
The question before us is therefore straightforward. Does the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission preserve the historic American understanding of liberty of conscience, or does it redefine it? That question cannot be answered by examining motives. It must be answered by examining the Commission's own language, recommendations, and underlying assumptions.

The Commission's Central Claim
The Commission's understanding of religious liberty was expressed not only in its written report but also in the public remarks of its chairman, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, when the report was presented to President Trump.

Referring to the phrase "separation of church and state," Patrick stated: "...the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution... From this day forward, that phrase should have no power over people of all faiths ever again in America."

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This statement deserves careful consideration. Patrick is correct in one respect. The exact phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the Constitution. But that has never been the central question. The real question is whether the Constitution establishes the principle that civil government possesses limited jurisdiction in matters of religion.

As we saw in the previous chapter, America's founders answered that question with remarkable consistency. Roger Williams described a hedge separating the church from the civil power. Isaac Backus distinguished two governments that "ought never to be confounded together." John Leland insisted that government possesses no rightful authority over the conscience. Thomas Jefferson explained that the legitimate powers of government reach "actions only, and not opinions." James Madison defended the same principle, and the First Amendment embodied it in constitutional law. And they defined it as the separation of church and state.

The founders used different language, but they defended the same constitutional limitation. This booklet is not an argument for preserving Jefferson's phrase. It is an argument for preserving the constitutional principle that Jefferson's phrase describes.

With that distinction in mind, we may now examine the Commission's report itself. Perhaps no statement better illustrates the Commission's direction than its discussion of the separation of church and state. The report states:

"The concept of a 'wall of separation between church and state' can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another... Perhaps a better analogy is that religious liberty acts as a bridge between church and state." (Page 22)

At first glance this may appear to be merely a change in terminology. In reality, it represents a different constitutional philosophy. A wall establishes a jurisdictional boundary, while a bridge establishes an institutional connection. Jefferson described the legitimate powers of

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government as reaching "actions only, and not opinions." The Commission instead speaks of building a bridge between church and state. One emphasizes constitutional restraint; the other emphasizes institutional cooperation. The difference is not merely rhetorical. It reflects two different understandings of the relationship between civil government and religion.

That distinction becomes even clearer when the report's recommendations are viewed together. The Commission encourages expanded partnerships between government and faith-based organizations, broader opportunities for religious institutions to receive government funding, repeal of the Johnson Amendment, additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life, and the creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty. Each proposal may certainly be debated on its own merits. Taken together, however, they reveal a consistent direction. Religious liberty is increasingly presented not merely as protection from governmental interference, but as a framework for closer institutional cooperation between government and religion.

One important question naturally follows.

What happens when partnership requires government to make religious decisions?

Every institutional partnership requires standards. Government must determine which organizations qualify for funding, what activities deserve public support, what groups receive official recognition, and where the limits are drawn. Questions that once belonged entirely to the church gradually become questions of public administration.

History demonstrates that this is how jurisdiction slowly expands. The issue is not whether today's officials intend persecution. The issue is whether civil government gradually assumes responsibilities that previous generations believed belonged to the conscience alone. America's founders sought to prevent that progression by limiting governmental jurisdiction from the very beginning.

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At this point an important clarification is necessary. The issue is not whether religion should influence society. It should. Jesus preached publicly. The apostles preached publicly. The prophets addressed kings. Christians should proclaim the gospel, defend truth, strengthen families, care for the poor, and seek justice within their communities. America's founders never intended religion to be confined to private life.

Beyond the Commission

The Commission's recommendations do not exist in isolation. They reflect ideas that have gained increasing influence within broader religious and political circles concerning the proper relationship between Christianity and civil government.

For example, Vice President J. D. Vance has stated that his views on public policy are "pretty aligned with Catholic social teaching." He has also appeared at conferences where influential speakers argued that civil government should be shaped by biblical laws and Christian political principles rather than maintaining the historic constitutional distinction between church and state.

This is significant because Catholic social teaching has long addressed the relationship between the Church and the civil order. Pope Leo XIII, whose social encyclicals laid the foundation for modern Catholic social teaching, urged Catholics:

"All Catholics should do all in their power to cause the constitutions of states, and legislation, to be modeled on the principles of the true Church."

Whether one agrees with Pope Leo XIII or not is not the issue. The issue is that his understanding of civil government differs fundamentally from the understanding articulated by Jefferson, Madison, Backus, Leland, and the First Amendment. One envisions legislation being modeled upon the principles of the Church. The other limits civil government to its God-given jurisdiction while leaving worship and conscience entirely to God.

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The Commission's report likewise presents historical examples of government encouraging religious observance as positive precedents. In its discussion of religious liberty within the military, it approvingly cites President Abraham Lincoln's General Order calling for the orderly observance of the Sabbath within the Army and Navy. Because Lincoln's order referred to Sunday observance, the report treats governmental encouragement of religious observance as part of America's constitutional tradition rather than asking whether such measures fall within the proper jurisdiction of civil government.

Yet this is precisely the constitutional question. Is encouraging religious observance one of the civil magistrate's God-given responsibilities, or does it move civil government beyond the jurisdiction God assigned it?

None of these examples—considered individually—proves that America has abandoned its historic understanding of liberty of conscience. Viewed together, however, they point in the same direction.

Dan Patrick argues that the principle of separation should lose its influence. The Commission proposes replacing a wall with a bridge. Bishop Barron argues against reducing religion to private judgment. J. D. Vance openly embraces Catholic social teaching as a model for public policy. The Commission cites governmental encouragement of Sunday observance as part of America's constitutional tradition.

The significance of these examples is not that they are identical. It is that they all move in the same direction—away from asking where government must stop and toward asking how government can promote religion.

That represents a significant shift from the constitutional philosophy of the founders, who believed religion was strongest when civil government remained within the limits God had assigned it.

The issue is not whether religion should be public.
The issue is whether civil government should become institutionally responsible for religion.

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A free church influencing society through preaching, persuasion, education, charity, and moral example is entirely consistent with liberty of conscience. Government becoming institutionally responsible for religion is something altogether different.

Ultimately, every discussion concerning religious liberty returns to a single question:

Who possesses jurisdiction over the conscience?
Scripture answers that question by placing the conscience under God's authority alone. Jefferson answered by insisting that government reaches actions only, not opinions. The First Amendment answered by prohibiting Congress from establishing religion while protecting its free exercise. The founders consistently protected liberty by limiting governmental authority.

The Commission, however, repeatedly shifts the emphasis from constitutional restraint toward institutional cooperation between government and religion. That is why replacing the wall with a bridge is so significant. The metaphor reflects an entirely different constitutional philosophy.

History repeatedly demonstrates a remarkably consistent pattern. Churches seek governmental assistance. Government provides support. Support gradually becomes oversight. Oversight becomes regulation. Regulation becomes influence. Influence eventually reaches the conscience. This progression seldom begins with persecution. More often it begins with cooperation, mutual benefit, and the best of intentions. America's founders understood that danger. They did not establish constitutional restraints because they distrusted Christianity. They established them because they understood human nature and recognized that concentrated power, whether exercised by church or state, has a tendency to exceed its proper limits.

The Commission repeatedly asks how religion can strengthen America. That is a worthy question. A more fundamental question is this:

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How can America preserve liberty of conscience while religion continues to strengthen society?
For nearly two and a half centuries the American answer has been remarkably consistent. Religion remains entirely free. Government remains constitutionally limited. The church influences society through preaching, education, charity, and moral persuasion, while government protects that freedom without becoming religion's institutional partner.

The purpose of this booklet has never been to argue that religion should retreat from public life. Christianity should continue to influence society through faithful preaching, compassionate ministry, education, charity, and moral leadership.

The question has always been one of jurisdiction.

Who governs the conscience?

Christ answered that question before Pilate.
America's founders answered it in the Constitution.
History answered it through centuries of persecution.

The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission now asks America to reconsider it.

Every generation must decide whether civil government will remain within the limits God assigned it, or whether it will gradually assume authority over matters that belong to God alone.

The conscience belongs to God. Caesar has no rightful claim upon it.

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Chapter 7 -The Final Test of Liberty of Conscience

Throughout this study we have examined religious liberty from three perspectives. We began with Scripture, where Christ distinguished His kingdom from the kingdoms of this world and declared that His servants do not advance His cause through civil force. We then examined the constitutional principles embraced by America's founders, who recognized that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience. Finally, we considered the recommendations of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission and asked whether they preserve that historic understanding or move in a different direction.

These questions are important not merely because they concern constitutional history. According to Bible prophecy, they become central in the closing conflict between Christ and Satan.

From Genesis to Revelation, the great controversy has never centered merely upon politics, economics, or civil government. At its heart lies the question of worship. Who is worthy of worship? Who possesses authority over the conscience? Who determines religious truth? These questions reach their climax in Revelation 13, where worship is enforced by civil authority under the threat of economic sanctions and ultimately death. The final conflict is therefore not fundamentally political. It is a conflict over jurisdiction. Who has authority over worship? God or the state?

Jesus answered that question before Pilate:
"My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight." (John 18:36)

Throughout this booklet we have returned repeatedly to these words because they establish the biblical boundary between Christ's kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. Civil government bears the sword to preserve public order. Christ governs the conscience through truth, love, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Genuine worship cannot be compelled because it must arise from a willing heart.

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The book of Daniel illustrates this same principle. In Daniel 3, Nebuchadnezzar erected a golden image and commanded every nation to worship it under penalty of death. In Daniel 6, another decree prohibited prayer to anyone except the king. In both instances, the issue was not whether civil government existed. God Himself had ordained civil government. The issue was whether civil rulers possessed authority over worship. The faithful obeyed the king in every lawful matter, but when civil authority claimed jurisdiction over the conscience, they obeyed God rather than men.
Revelation presents the same issue on a worldwide scale. The beast receives worship. An image to the beast is formed. The second beast causes the inhabitants of the earth to worship the first beast. The prophecy is not merely predicting persecution. It is predicting the reappearance of the same governing principle that has appeared throughout history: civil authority assuming jurisdiction over worship.

An image reflects the character of the original. The medieval system united ecclesiastical authority with civil power to enforce religious conformity. Revelation predicts not merely another persecution, but the reappearance of that governing principle. Whenever civil government assumes authority over worship, the image begins to form because the same relationship between church and state has returned.

America's Providential Beginning
Ellen White understood that the rise of the United States occupied a unique place in prophecy. Before describing America's future role in Revelation 13, she first explained why the nation became such a powerful defender of liberty of conscience.

She wrote:
"Among the Christian exiles who first fled to America and sought an asylum from royal oppression and priestly intolerance were many who

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determined **to establish a government upon the broad foundation of civil and religious liberty**.... Freedom of religious faith was also granted, every man being permitted to worship God according to the dictates of **his conscience**.... **Republicanism and Protestantism became the fundamental principles of the nation**. These principles are the secret of its power and prosperity." *(The Great Controversy, p. 441.)*

This statement deserves careful attention. Ellen White identifies two principles that distinguished America from the nations of Europe.

Republicanism recognized that civil authority derives its just powers from the consent of the governed rather than from ecclesiastical control or hereditary monarchy.

Protestantism, in its historic sense, represented more than a collection of denominations. It embodied the great protest against the union of church and state that had dominated much of medieval Europe through the Papal church. It affirmed the supremacy of Scripture, the direct accountability of every individual to God, and the liberty of every person to worship according to the dictates of conscience without civil coercion.

Together these principles established constitutional restraints that protected liberty of conscience unlike any nation before it.

Liberty Must Be Extended to Everyone

Yet Ellen White was equally careful not to idealize America's beginnings. Although many of the early colonists came seeking freedom from religious persecution, they did not always extend that same freedom to others.

She observed:

"Yet honest and God-fearing as they were, the Pilgrims did not yet comprehend the great principle of religious toleration. The freedom which they sacrificed so much to secure for themselves, they were not equally ready to grant to others." *(The Great Controversy, p. 292.)*

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She then describes what happened when church and civil authority became united in the Massachusetts Bay Colony:

"The regulation was adopted by the colonists, that only church-members should have a voice in the civil government.... A kind of State church was formed... the magistrates being authorized to suppress heresy. Thus the secular power was in the hands of the church. It was not long before these measures led to the inevitable result—persecution." *(The Great Controversy, p. 293.)*

The lesson is unmistakable. Even sincere and devoted Christians can repeat the mistakes of history whenever civil government assumes authority over religion. The problem was never Christianity itself. The problem was the union of ecclesiastical authority with the coercive power of the state.

The Prophetic Warning

Having explained both America's strengths and its early failures, Ellen White then looked forward to the final crisis.

She summarized the biblical principle in these words:
"To protect liberty of conscience is the duty of the state, and this is the limit of its authority in matters of religion." *(The Great Controversy, p. 201.)*

This statement perfectly harmonizes with the teachings of Christ, the apostles, and the principles embraced by America's founders. Civil government is ordained by God, but its authority has divinely established limits. It exists to preserve justice and civil order, not to govern worship or the conscience.

Because of this principle, Ellen White repeatedly warned against every movement that would weaken the constitutional restraints protecting liberty of conscience. Writing in 1900, she declared:

"An amendment to the Constitution restricting liberty of conscience, has long been urged upon the legislators of the nation; and the question of

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enforcing Sunday observance has become one of national importance. Are we ready for the issue involved in the Sunday movement?" *(Signs of the Times, November 28, 1900.)*

It is significant that she begins, not with Sunday, but with **"an amendment to the Constitution restricting liberty of conscience."** The prophetic issue is constitutional before it is ceremonial. Sunday legislation becomes significant because it represents civil government exercising authority over worship.

Her warning becomes even more direct in *The Great Controversy*:

"Let the restraints now imposed by secular governments be removed and Rome be reinstated in her former power, and there would speedily be a revival of her tyranny and persecution." *(The Great Controversy, p. 564.)*

Throughout this booklet we have identified those restraints. They are the constitutional principles that deny civil government jurisdiction over the conscience and protect every individual's right to worship according to the dictates of conscience. Remove those restraints, and history demonstrates what follows. The issue is not merely one religious observance or another. The issue is whether civil government possesses authority to command worship.

Conclusion
This brings us back to the question that has guided this entire study.

Who possesses jurisdiction over the conscience?

Scripture answers: God.
Christ answered: God.

America's founders sought to preserve that principle by carefully limiting the jurisdiction of civil government.

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Ellen White warned that the final conflict would arise when those constitutional restraints began to disappear.

As America commemorates 250 years of constitutional government, the preservation of liberty of conscience deserves more than patriotic celebration. It deserves careful vigilance. Liberty has rarely been lost all at once. More often it has been redefined—gradually, respectfully, and with the best of intentions. The issue has never been whether religion should influence society. The issue has always been whether civil government should exercise authority over worship.

That question stood before Nebuchadnezzar.
It stood before Darius.
It stood before Pilate.
It confronted the Pilgrims as they struggled to extend the liberty they themselves had sought.

According to Revelation, it will soon stand before the entire world once again.

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Appendix A

Selected Statements from the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
The purpose of this appendix is to provide several representative statements from the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission and its members that are discussed throughout this booklet. They are presented so readers may examine the Commission's own language alongside the constitutional and biblical principles discussed in the preceding chapters.

1. Dan Patrick -Chairman, Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
On "Separation of Church and State"
"...the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution... From this day forward, that phrase should have no power over people of all faiths ever again in America."

2. Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Report
From a Wall to a Bridge
"The concept of a 'wall of separation between church and state' can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another... Perhaps a better analogy is that religious liberty acts as a bridge between church and state."

3. Recommendations of the Commission
Among the recommendations discussed in this booklet are:

- Expanded partnerships between government and faith-based organizations.
- Increased opportunities for religious organizations to participate in government funding.
- Repeal of the Johnson Amendment.
- Additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life.
- Creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty.

These recommendations are presented by the Commission as ways to strengthen religious liberty.

4. Bishop Robert Barron - Member, Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
On Religion in Public Life
"If you marginalized and privatized religion, democracy is in danger... Values is up to me. My gender, it's up to me. The whole structure of my life, it's my choice. That's deadly to our democracy."

Questions for the Reader
After reading the report and the statements above, consider the following questions:

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- Does the Commission define religious liberty in the same way America's founders defined it?
- Does replacing a "wall" with a "bridge" preserve the constitutional limits placed upon civil government, or does it encourage a different relationship between government and religion?
- Can government become an institutional partner with religion while remaining outside the jurisdiction of the conscience?
- How should Christians encourage religion's influence upon society while preserving the constitutional principle that civil government possesses no authority over worship?

These are the questions this booklet has sought to examine.

Appendix B
The Great Controversy over Liberty of Conscience- A Biblical and Historical Timeline
c. 605 B.C. — Daniel 3: Worship by Civil Decree
King Nebuchadnezzar erects a golden image and commands all nations to worship it under penalty of death. The issue is not civil government itself, but civil government exercising authority over worship.
c. 539 B.C. — Daniel 6: Prayer Forbidden
King Darius signs a decree prohibiting prayer to anyone except the king for thirty days. Daniel obeys the king in all lawful matters but refuses to surrender his conscience to civil authority.
A.D. 31 — Christ Before Pilate
Jesus declares: *"My kingdom is not of this world... if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight."*
Christ distinguishes His kingdom from the kingdoms of this world and establishes the biblical boundary between civil authority and the conscience.
A.D. 31 — "Render Unto Caesar"
Jesus teaches that Caesar has legitimate authority—but only within the sphere God has assigned him.
A.D. 31–33 — The Apostles Before the Sanhedrin
Peter declares: *"We ought to obey God rather than men."*
The apostles recognize the legitimacy of civil authority while affirming that God's authority over the conscience is supreme

The Development of American Religious Liberty
1636 — Roger Williams Calls for a "hedge or wall of separation" protecting the church from civil power.
1773–1774 — Isaac Backus Distinguishes the two governments ordained by God that "ought never to be confounded together."
1780s — John Leland Argues that liberty of conscience is far more than mere toleration because government possesses no rightful authority over religion.
1785 — James Madison Publishes his *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, defending liberty of conscience and arguing that religion is exempt from

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the authority of civil society.
1791 — The First Amendment Congress is forbidden from establishing religion while protecting its free exercise.
1790 — George Washington Promises that the United States gives "to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."
1802 — Thomas Jefferson Describes the First Amendment as building "a wall of separation between Church & State."

The Historical Debate
1832 — Gregory XVI *Mirari Vos* Rejects unrestricted liberty of conscience.
1864 — Pius IX *Quanta Cura* Describes liberty of conscience as "a most pestilential error."
1888 — Leo XIII *Libertas* Argues that unrestricted liberty of worship is not true liberty.
1965 — Vatican II *Dignitatis Humanae* Affirms immunity from coercion in religious matters while presenting this as a development of Catholic teaching. Yet, claiming not to have changed.

The Prophetic Perspective
1900 — Ellen White
Warns of efforts to amend the Constitution restricting liberty of conscience and identifies this as the beginning of the Sunday movement.

The Great Controversy
States: "To protect liberty of conscience is the duty of the state, and this is the limit of its authority in matters of religion."

She also warns: "Let the restraints now imposed by secular governments be removed... there would speedily be a revival of her tyranny and persecution."

Today -2026 — Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
The Commission recommends a "bridge" rather than a "wall" between church and state and calls for expanded institutional cooperation between government and religion, raising the constitutional questions examined throughout this booklet.

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DOJ-RLC Comment-012361

From: Cherrie [redacted]
To: "RLC (OASG)" [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Keep Church and State Separate
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:14:01 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whom it concerns,

As a firm believer in the Bible and bringing the Savior's message to all people, I'm writing on behalf of keeping separation of church and state in place as it has been written for hundreds of years now in the constitution of the United States of America.

In the Bible, these two entities were instructed to be separate and so shall the United States follow that same path as we always have. Making changes to the relationship between church and state will only bring suppression. It was done in the past by Ancient Rome, religion and state were mixed by the papacy and thus killed millions trying to keep them from translating the Bible. Not only that but also when finding truths in the Bible that were in opposition to the papacy, they also drowned, killed, and tortured them for believing differently than the current state said they had to believe. Finally, the Protestant nation was able to escape to the new America and fought for freedom of conscience here in which we have been successful at.

I'm very thankful to have been born in a country that has allowed me to express freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and the freedom to talk to others about the Bible as I know it.

Separation between church and state has allowed the word of God to be spread from one nation to another and within the USA. It has allowed many other religions to express their beliefs without hinderance. We are a nation of many religions. In order to protect those people of many different religions, we must also keep church and state separate.

Please vote against any changes for church and state.

Thank you,
Cherri

Sent from my iPhone

From: G <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Please Read
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:14:39 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: From_Separation_to_Partnership_-_Addressing_the_Religious_Liberty_Commission.pdf

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Amendment I (1791) 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.

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How the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Redefines Religious Liberty

The Question Before America- Introduction

For more than two centuries, the United States has understood religious liberty to rest upon a simple but profound principle. Thomas Jefferson expressed it in his famous letter to the Danbury Baptist Association:

*"Believing with you that religion is a matter which **lies solely between Man & his God**, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach **actions only, & NOT OPINIONS**."*

President Donald Trump receives the report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission at the White House. This booklet examines the Commission's recommendations in eradicating the term "separation of church and state".

Those words captured the historic American understanding of liberty of conscience. Civil government was ordained by God, but its authority was deliberately limited. It was entrusted with the responsibility of preserving justice, protecting life, and maintaining civil order. It was **not** entrusted with authority over faith, worship, or the conscience.

The issue has never been whether government is ordained by God. Scripture plainly teaches that it is. The issue has always been where God said government must stop.

The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission affirms the importance of religion and rightly recognizes the vital role faith has played in the history of the United States. Yet its recommendations represent a significant shift in emphasis. Rather than defining religious liberty primarily by the constitutional limits placed upon civil government, the Commission encourages a closer institutional relationship between

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government and religion. It proposes replacing the familiar "wall of separation" with a "bridge" between church and state.

This booklet argues that the question before America is not whether religion should influence society. It should. Nor is the question whether government should protect the free exercise of religion. It must.

The question is whether civil government should move beyond protecting religious liberty and begin fostering an institutional partnership with religion.

That question reaches far beyond constitutional interpretation. It touches the biblical distinction Christ established between His kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. It shaped the convictions of America's founders, influenced the framing of the First Amendment, and ultimately points forward to the final conflict over worship described in Bible prophecy.

The pages that follow examine that question from three perspectives—Scripture, history, and the Constitution, to determine whether America's historic understanding of liberty of conscience is being preserved or redefined.

The conscience is not outside God's government—it is outside Caesar's.

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Chapter One - Liberty of Conscience Begins with God

Religious liberty is not first a constitutional principle. **It is a biblical principle.**

Long before legislatures enacted laws, before nations drafted constitutions, and before courts interpreted rights, God established the proper relationship between His kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. The distinction between civil authority and the conscience did not originate with Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Roger Williams, or any other statesman. It originated with Jesus Christ.

One of the clearest statements ever made concerning that distinction occurred while Jesus stood before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Accused of claiming to be a king, Jesus answered:

"My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence." (John 18:36)

This declaration establishes the foundation upon which every discussion of religious liberty must rest. Christ was not denying the legitimacy of civil government. He was defining its jurisdiction.

In fact, only a few verses later Jesus acknowledged that Pilate's authority had been given "from above" (John 19:11). Civil government has a legitimate place within God's order. Yet Christ made it unmistakably clear that His kingdom operates upon entirely different principles.

Earthly governments preserve civil order. They enact laws, punish crime, defend innocent life, and bear the sword against evildoers. Christ's kingdom advances in another way. It governs not by civil force, but by truth, conviction, love, and the work of the Holy Spirit upon the conscience. It never compels genuine faith by civil power.

Jesus explained the difference in a single sentence:

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"If My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight."

Earthly kingdoms ultimately rely upon force to maintain their authority. Christ's kingdom does not. Faith produced by coercion is not faith at all. A government may compel outward actions, but it cannot produce love for God. It may punish crime, but it cannot create holiness. It may command attendance, but it cannot command worship. Worship belongs to another kingdom.

Christ's words establish the biblical foundation of liberty of conscience. His kingdom does not spread by the sword of Caesar but by the power of truth working upon willing hearts.

The Two Jurisdictions
Jesus reinforced this principle when asked whether taxes should be paid to Caesar. Holding up a coin, He answered:

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21)

With these few words, Christ established two distinct jurisdictions. Caesar possesses legitimate authority. God possesses supreme authority. The question is not whether government has authority. Scripture plainly teaches that it does. The question is **what authority God has entrusted to it.**

Worship belongs to God. Faith belongs to God. Conscience belongs to God. No earthly ruler may rightfully claim what belongs exclusively to the Creator. Whenever civil government attempts to prescribe doctrine, direct worship, or compel religious belief, it reaches beyond the authority God has granted it. Those things belong to **God's jurisdiction** alone.

God Ordained Civil Government
The Bible does not teach anarchy. The Apostle Paul wrote:

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"For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." (Romans 13:1)

Civil government is God's servant for the preservation of society. Paul explains that rulers are appointed to reward those who do good and punish those who do evil. They "bear not the sword in vain," for they are "the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:4).

The sword is a civil instrument. It exists to restrain violence, protect innocent life, punish crime, and preserve public order. It was never given to enforce faith, determine doctrine, compel worship, or govern the conscience. God entrusted civil rulers with authority over civil matters—not over the conscience.

Romans 13 establishes both the authority and the limits of civil government. The magistrate bears the sword to preserve civil order and punish those who commit outward acts of evil. Yet nowhere does Scripture authorize civil government to compel worship, prescribe doctrine, or govern the heart. Those belong to God's jurisdiction alone. Civil rulers judge outward conduct; God alone judges the heart.

This distinction is essential. Not every sin falls within the jurisdiction of civil government. God condemns pride, covetousness, lust, hatred, envy, unbelief, idolatry, and every sinful thought of the heart. These are violations of God's moral law, yet they are not crimes that the civil magistrate is authorized to punish. No government can imprison a man for coveting his neighbor's house, fine him for pride, or sentence him for hatred in his heart. These sins are real, and God will judge them, but He has reserved that judgment to Himself.

Civil government is ordained to punish outward acts that violate the rights and safety of others—murder, theft, fraud, violence, and similar

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offenses. It was never commissioned to enforce the whole of God's moral law. If it were, the magistrate would be required to punish every violation of the Ten Commandments, including idolatry, unbelief, covetousness, and every sinful desire of the heart. Furthermore, with the punishment of death. We would all be guilty. (Romans 3:19) Scripture gives no such authority.

This is the distinction of jurisdiction. God ordained civil government to restrain outward acts that disturb the peace and safety of society. He never entrusted it with authority over worship, faith, repentance, doctrine, or the conscience. Those remain under His government alone.

The Limits of Civil Authority

The apostles themselves recognized this distinction. When commanded by the Jewish authorities to stop preaching Christ, Peter answered:

"We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

Peter did not deny the legitimacy of civil government, nor did he call for rebellion. He simply recognized that civil authority has limits. Whenever earthly rulers command what God forbids, or forbid what God commands, the jurisdiction of Caesar has ended and the jurisdiction of God remains supreme.

This is the very essence of liberty of conscience. No government possesses the authority to stand between God and the individual soul.

Faith Cannot Be Forced

Throughout Scripture, God appeals to mankind through persuasion rather than coercion.

Moses pleaded: *"I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life."* (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Joshua challenged Israel: *"Choose you this day whom ye will serve."* (Joshua 24:15)

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Paul wrote: *"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* (Romans 10:17)

Again he declared: *"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men."* (2 Corinthians 5:11)

The biblical pattern is unmistakable. God reveals truth. He invites. He warns. He pleads. He persuades. He never produces genuine worship through civil compulsion. If the Almighty Himself does not force the conscience, no earthly government has the right to do so.

Conclusion

The Scriptures establish two governments, each ordained by God for a distinct purpose. Civil government exists to preserve justice, punish wrongdoing, and protect society. It governs outward conduct. Christ's kingdom governs the heart, transforming the conscience through truth, love, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Confusing these two jurisdictions has produced some of the darkest chapters in human history. Whenever the church has sought the sword of the state, or the state has assumed authority over the conscience, liberty has suffered and religion has been corrupted. The chapters that follow will demonstrate how this biblical principle profoundly influenced the development of religious liberty in America, shaped the thinking of the nation's founders, and remains the defining issue in the ongoing debate over the proper relationship between church and state.

Biblical religious liberty is therefore far more than a constitutional principle. It is a divine principle established by Christ Himself.

Civil government is ordained by God, but it was never ordained to govern the conscience. The conscience belongs to God. Caesar has no rightful claim upon it.

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Chapter 2 - America's Founders Recognized the Limits of Civil Government

The principle of liberty of conscience did not begin with America's founders. As we saw in the previous chapter, it began with Jesus Christ Himself, who distinguished His kingdom from the kingdoms of this world and taught that what belongs to God must never be claimed by Caesar.

The founders of the United States did not invent this principle. Rather, they recognized it after centuries of painful experience and sought to preserve it in the constitutional system they established.

The American experiment in religious liberty was born from HISTORY For centuries, Europe witnessed repeated attempts to enforce religious conformity through civil power. Kings legislated doctrine. Magistrates enforced religious decrees. Churches relied upon the sword of the state to preserve orthodoxy, while governments relied upon religious institutions to strengthen political authority.

The result was not religious unity. It was persecution, imprisonment, confiscation of property, exile, torture, and death. America's founders knew this history well, and they were determined not to repeat it.

Roger Williams

Long before the American Revolution, Roger Williams recognized the danger of uniting church and state. A Puritan minister in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Williams believed that civil government had no authority over matters of faith and conscience. His convictions brought him into direct conflict with the colony's leaders, who believed the civil magistrate should help

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preserve religious uniformity. In 1635, Williams was banished from Massachusetts because of these convictions.

After establishing the colony of Rhode Island, he sought to build a society where liberty of conscience would be protected and civil government would exercise no authority over worship.

Describing the proper relationship between church and state, Williams wrote of: *"...the hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wilderness of the world."*

Williams' concern was not to protect the government from religion. It was to protect the church from the corrupting influence of civil power. He understood that once the civil magistrate entered the affairs of religion, both institutions would suffer. The church would gradually lose its spiritual independence, while the state would become entangled in matters that belonged to God alone.

Isaac Backus
A century later, Baptist minister Isaac Backus continued the same argument. Opposing the establishment of religion by civil government, he wrote:
"God has appointed two kinds of government in the world, which are in their nature and ought never to be confounded together."

Backus understood what Christ had taught centuries earlier. God ordained civil government to preserve justice and order, but He never gave it authority over faith or worship. To confuse those two governments was to violate the jurisdiction God Himself had established.

The language differs from Christ's teaching about rendering unto Caesar and unto God, but the principle is identical. There are two governments, two jurisdictions, and each must remain within the sphere God has assigned it.

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John Leland
John Leland, who greatly influenced James Madison regarding the first amendment carried this principle even further. A close friend of James Madison and an influential Baptist minister during the debates surrounding the Constitution, Leland insisted that liberty of conscience was more than mere toleration.

He wrote: *"The liberty I contend for is more than toleration. The very idea of toleration is despicable."*

Leland understood that toleration assumes government possesses authority over religion and merely chooses not to exercise it. Liberty of conscience rests upon an entirely different foundation. Government has no rightful jurisdiction over the conscience in the first place.

Leland also warned: *"The notion of a Christian commonwealth should be exploded forever."*

He was not arguing against Christianity influencing society. Rather, he rejected the idea that civil government should assume responsibility for enforcing Christianity.

Thomas Jefferson
Perhaps no founder expressed this principle more clearly than Thomas Jefferson. Writing to the Danbury Baptist Association on January 1, 1802, Jefferson declared:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions."

Jefferson did not merely defend religious tolerance. He identified the proper jurisdiction of civil government. Government may regulate actions affecting civil society, but it has no jurisdiction over faith, worship, or conscience. That authority belongs to God alone.

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Years earlier, Jefferson reflected upon Europe's history with these sobering words:
"Millions of innocent men, women, and children... have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch toward uniformity."

His conclusion was unmistakable. Civil force had failed to produce genuine faith. Instead, it had produced centuries of suffering.

James Madison
James Madison shared the same conviction. Often called the "Father of the Constitution," he became one of America's strongest defenders of liberty of conscience. Reflecting upon Europe's long history of religious persecution, Madison wrote:
"The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."

Madison was not speaking in the abstract. He was looking back upon centuries in which civil governments enforced religious conformity through the power of the state. Throughout much of the Middle Ages and beyond, church and civil authorities worked together to suppress what they regarded as heresy. The result was imprisonment, torture, confiscation of property, exile, and death.

Both Madison and Jefferson reached the same conclusion. Civil force cannot produce genuine faith. Instead of preserving religion, it corrupts both the church and the state. Whether expressed as "separation," "liberty of conscience," or the "free exercise" of religion, the principle remained the same. Civil government was never intended to govern religion. Its duty is to protect every person's liberty to worship God—or to decline worship—according to the dictates of conscience, without coercion from the state.

George Washington
America's first president expressed the practical result of these principles in his famous letter to the Hebrew Congregation at Newport

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in 1790:
"The Government of the United States... gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."

Washington did not speak merely of toleration. He envisioned a nation in which citizens of every faith could worship freely because government neither established religion nor persecuted those who differed.

The Constitution would not create religious liberty. Rather, it would protect the liberty of conscience that belongs to every person as a gift from God.

The First Amendment
These principles found expression in the First Amendment to the Constitution:
"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

Notice that the Amendment accomplishes two complementary purposes. First, it prevents the civil government from establishing religion. Second, it protects the free exercise of religion. These are not competing ideas, they are inseparable. Government refrains from exercising authority over religion precisely so that religion may remain free.

The freedom of the church depends upon the restraint of the state.

Is "Separation of Church and State" in the Constitution?
One objection frequently raised today is that the phrase "separation of church and state" never appears in the Constitution. That observation is correct. The exact phrase is not found in the Constitution. But the question is not whether Jefferson's particular wording appears. The question is whether the principle appears.

The First Amendment declares:

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"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

Those words establish two complementary principles. Civil government may not establish religion, and it may not interfere with the free exercise of religion. Thomas Jefferson later described this constitutional arrangement as building **"a wall of separation between Church & State."** He was not inventing a new constitutional doctrine. He was describing the practical effect of the First Amendment.

Jefferson was not alone. James Madison defended the same principle. Roger Williams described a hedge or wall separating the church from the wilderness of the world. Isaac Backus spoke of two governments that "ought never to be confounded together." John Leland insisted that government possesses no rightful authority over the conscience. Though they expressed the idea differently, they defended the same constitutional principle: **civil government possesses no jurisdiction over religion because the conscience belongs to God.**

The issue, therefore, is not whether Jefferson's particular phrase appears in the Constitution. The issue is whether the Constitution limits civil government in matters of religion.

It plainly does.

Protecting Both Church and State

One of the greatest misunderstandings surrounding the phrase *"separation of church and state"* is the assumption that it was designed either to exclude religion from public life or merely to protect government from religious influence. The founders understood the issue differently. They believed that God had ordained both civil government and the church, but had entrusted each with a different jurisdiction.

History had repeatedly demonstrated the danger of confusing those jurisdictions. Whenever the church sought the power of the state, it gained political influence but lost its spiritual independence. Whenever

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the state assumed authority over religion, it became entangled in matters of faith and conscience that God had never entrusted to it. The result was not liberty, but persecution.

Roger Williams sought to preserve the church from the corrupting influence of civil power. Isaac Backus distinguished the two governments that God had ordained and insisted they must never be confounded. John Leland rejected mere toleration because he believed government possessed no rightful authority over the conscience. Thomas Jefferson limited the legitimate powers of government to "actions only, and not opinions." James Madison sought to spare America the religious bloodshed that had soaked the soil of Europe for centuries. George Washington envisioned a nation that would "give to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."

Though each expressed the principle in different language, they defended the same fundamental truth: civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience. By keeping church and state within their God-given spheres, they sought to preserve the independence of both institutions. The church would remain free to proclaim truth without relying upon civil power, and the government would remain free from assuming authority over worship, doctrine, or faith. In protecting liberty of conscience, they protected both the church and the state from exercising authority that belonged only to God.

Conclusion

America's founders did not establish liberty of conscience because they distrusted religion. They established it because they understood both Scripture and history. They recognized that Christ's kingdom advances through truth rather than force, and they deliberately limited the jurisdiction of civil government to preserve that principle.

For nearly 250 years, this understanding of liberty of conscience has distinguished the United States from the systems that preceded it. The question now before the nation is whether that historic understanding will be preserved, or fundamentally redefined.

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Chapter 3 -Religious Liberty Redefined

"The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." — Thomas Jefferson

A New Direction
The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission was established to examine the state of religious liberty in America and recommend ways to strengthen it. At first glance, many of its recommendations appear commendable. The report affirms the importance of religion, recognizes the indispensable role faith has played throughout American history, and calls for protecting the free exercise of religion. Every Christian should welcome sincere efforts to preserve the freedom to worship God according to the dictates of conscience.

The question before us, however, is not whether religious liberty should be protected. The question is **how the Commission defines religious liberty.** Throughout history, liberty has seldom disappeared by being openly abolished. More often it has been redefined until the original principle is scarcely recognized.

For nearly 250 years, the American understanding of religious liberty rested upon a simple constitutional principle: **civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience.** Government protected religious liberty precisely because it limited its own authority. The Commission proposes a different emphasis.

Rather than focusing primarily upon the constitutional limits of civil authority, the report repeatedly encourages a closer relationship between government and religious institutions. That shift becomes especially clear in its discussion of the historic concept of the separation of church and state.

The report states:
"The concept of a 'wall of separation between church and state' can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another... Perhaps a better analogy is that religious liberty acts as a bridge between church and state."

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This statement deserves careful consideration because metaphors reveal assumptions. A wall establishes a boundary. A bridge establishes a connection. A wall limits jurisdiction. A bridge facilitates cooperation. Whether one prefers Jefferson's terminology or another expression, the historic American principle remained the same: civil government protects religious liberty by recognizing the limits of its own authority. The Commission's proposed metaphor points in a different direction.

From Protection to Partnership

That change in emphasis is reflected throughout the Commission's report. It recommends expanded cooperation with faith-based organizations, broader opportunities for religious organizations to receive government funding, repeal of the Johnson Amendment, additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life, the creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty, and even points to historical examples of governmental encouragement of Sabbath observance as positive precedents.

Each recommendation may be evaluated on its own merits. Taken together, however, they reveal a consistent shift in emphasis. For nearly two and a half centuries, America's understanding of religious liberty sought to preserve liberty of conscience by carefully limiting the jurisdiction of civil government in matters of religion. The Commission increasingly presents religious liberty not simply as protection from governmental interference, but as a framework for closer institutional cooperation between government and religion.

That distinction is more significant than it first appears. The historic American question was, "Where has God placed the limits of civil authority?" The Commission increasingly asks, "How can government and religion work together to strengthen society?" Those are fundamentally different questions. One preserves liberty by recognizing constitutional limits. The other encourages a closer institutional relationship between government and religion.

History demonstrates why that distinction matters. Once government becomes a partner with religion, it cannot avoid making religious

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judgments. It must determine which organizations qualify for public support, which religious practices deserve official recognition, and where the limits are to be drawn. The Commission's favorable reference to Abraham Lincoln's order encouraging Sabbath observance illustrates how quickly these questions move from protecting religious liberty to government encouraging religious practice. Whether future generations apply that principle more broadly, including questions surrounding Sunday observance, is a question Americans should not dismiss lightly.

Whether that shift ultimately strengthens religious liberty or gradually expands the role of civil government in religious affairs is the central question examined throughout this booklet.

Public Religion Is Not the Issue

At this point an important clarification is necessary. Nothing in this discussion suggests that religion should be confined to private life. Scripture teaches the opposite. Jesus preached publicly. The apostles preached publicly. The prophets addressed kings. Christians are called to proclaim the gospel, defend truth, care for the poor, pursue justice, and bear witness before rulers and nations.

The issue has never been whether religion should influence society. The issue is whether civil government should become institutionally involved in religion. Those are fundamentally different questions. A free church should influence the nation through persuasion, preaching, and faithful witness. A constitutional government should protect that freedom without assuming authority over religion itself.

The Question of Jurisdiction

Ultimately, every discussion concerning religious liberty returns to a single question:

What authority has God entrusted to civil government?

Scripture answers that question clearly. Civil government exists to preserve order, protect life, restrain violence, and punish crime. Worship, doctrine, faith, and conscience belong to another jurisdiction, and it is the duty of the civil government to protect the freedom of it.

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History repeatedly demonstrates what happens when that distinction is forgotten. Governments that begin by supporting religion eventually find themselves deciding religious questions. Which beliefs qualify for protection? Which religious organizations deserve public support? Which doctrines fall outside acceptable limits? Who determines what constitutes heresy? These questions are unavoidable whenever civil authority crosses into matters of conscience.

That is precisely the danger America's founders sought to prevent.

Why This Matters

The issue before America is therefore much larger than a disagreement over a metaphor. The question is whether the constitutional principle that protected liberty of conscience is being quietly redefined.

Replacing a wall with a bridge may sound harmless, but history teaches that liberty is rarely lost in a single dramatic moment. More often it is surrendered gradually, one definition at a time, one principle at a time, until the original safeguards are scarcely recognized.

If America's understanding of religious liberty shifts from protecting the conscience by limiting civil jurisdiction to encouraging institutional alliance between government and religion, then America has begun moving away from the constitutional principles that distinguished it from the Old World.

Before determining whether that shift represents progress or departure, we must first recognize that history itself presents two very different understandings of religious liberty. One sought to preserve liberty by limiting the authority of civil government in matters of religion. The other envisioned a closer relationship between civil authority and religious truth. Understanding those two models is essential before evaluating the direction America is now taking.

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Chapter 4 -Two Competing Historical Understandings of Religious Liberty

By the close of the eighteenth century, the United States had embraced a principle that distinguished it from nearly every nation in the world. Civil government would possess no jurisdiction over the conscience. Religion would neither be established by Congress nor prohibited by Congress, and the free exercise of religion would be protected because the conscience belonged to God alone.

This understanding did not arise in a vacuum. It emerged after centuries of conflict over the relationship between civil government and religion. To appreciate the significance of America's constitutional system, it is necessary to compare it with another historical understanding of religious liberty that prevailed throughout much of Europe for centuries. This comparison is not intended to criticize individuals or denominations. It is simply an examination of two different historical models.

The American Model

The American understanding of religious liberty rested upon one fundamental principle: **civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience.** As we have seen, this conviction was championed by Roger Williams, Isaac Backus, John Leland, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and ultimately embodied in the First Amendment. Though each expressed the principle differently, they agreed that the authority of civil government reached only its proper sphere.

Thomas Jefferson summarized that principle with remarkable clarity when he wrote:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions."

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Jefferson's distinction is both simple and profound. Government reaches actions, not opinions, worship, or conscience. Those belong to God alone.

James Madison expressed the same concern when reflecting upon the religious wars that had devastated Europe:
"The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."

These convictions found constitutional expression in the First Amendment, which prohibited Congress from establishing religion while protecting its free exercise. Under this model, religion remained free because civil government remained limited. The state's responsibility was not to determine religious truth but to protect every citizen's liberty of conscience.

The Historical Papal Model
For many centuries, the relationship between church and civil government developed differently throughout much of Catholic Europe. Rather than treating religion solely as a matter beyond civil jurisdiction, influential papal documents taught that civil society owed duties toward the true religion.

Pope Gregory XVI, writing in *Mirari Vos* (1832), rejected unrestricted liberty of conscience in some of the strongest language of the nineteenth century. Referring to what he viewed as religious indifferentism, he wrote:

"From this poisoned source of indifferentism flows that absurd and erroneous proposition, or rather delirium, that liberty of conscience must be asserted and vindicated for everyone."

Pope Pius IX reaffirmed the same position in *Quanta Cura* (1864), describing liberty of conscience as **"a most pestilential error."**

Pope Leo XIII continued this line of thought in *Libertas* (1888), writing:

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"Let us examine that liberty in individuals which is so opposed to the virtue of religion... A liberty such as we have described... is no liberty, but is degradation."

These statements did not deny the importance of religion. Rather, they reflected a different understanding of the relationship between civil authority and religious truth. Whereas Jefferson argued that religion lies solely between man and God, these papal documents maintained that civil society possesses obligations toward what it understands to be the true religion.

Civil Government and Religious Truth

The difference between these two systems extended beyond abstract principles. Throughout much of European history, civil rulers frequently assisted ecclesiastical authorities in suppressing heresy, enforcing religious conformity, and protecting what was regarded as the true faith. Likewise, church authorities often appealed to civil rulers to carry out judgments that the Church itself could not enforce through spiritual authority alone.

These arrangements varied considerably across countries and centuries, and their legal details changed over time. Nevertheless, they reflected a broader understanding that civil government and ecclesiastical authority could cooperate in matters concerning religion.

By contrast, the American constitutional model deliberately denied civil government jurisdiction over religious doctrine while protecting the liberty of every individual's conscience. The distinction was not merely practical. It represented two fundamentally different understandings of the relationship between church and state.

Two Different Starting Points

Although both systems acknowledged the importance of religion, they began from fundamentally different assumptions.

The American system asked, **What authority has God withheld from civil government?** Its answer was straightforward: **the conscience.** Civil

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government possesses legitimate authority over civil society, but worship, faith, and doctrine remain under God's jurisdiction alone.

The historical European model more often asked, **What duties does civil government owe toward the true religion?** Its answer generally included some form of cooperation between civil authority and religious truth as understood by the Church. Those different starting points produced two distinct understandings of religious liberty.

Why This Comparison Matters

The purpose of this chapter has not been to determine which historical model was correct. It has simply been to establish that two very different understandings of religious liberty existed. One limited civil government to its God-ordained jurisdiction and sought to protect liberty of conscience by restricting governmental authority.

Recognizing that distinction is essential before examining more recent developments. If America's understanding of religious liberty has remained unchanged, then contemporary discussions should reflect the same constitutional limits recognized by the founders. If, however, that understanding has changed, Americans should carefully examine how, why, and with what consequences.

If these two historical models differed so fundamentally, an obvious question arises: Has that difference disappeared, or has it simply been redefined?

To answer that question, we must examine the modern understanding of religious liberty and ask whether it represents a continuation of America's constitutional tradition, a development within Catholic thought, or the emergence of an entirely new relationship between church and state.

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Chapter 5- Vatican II and the Modern Understanding of Religious Liberty

The previous chapter demonstrated that two distinct historical understandings of religious liberty existed for centuries. America's founders understood liberty of conscience to mean that civil government possessed no jurisdiction over matters of faith and worship. Religion belonged to God, while government exercised authority only over civil affairs.

Historical Roman Catholic teaching approached the question differently. As we have seen, Popes Gregory XVI, Pius IX, and Leo XIII each criticized principles associated with unrestricted liberty of conscience and liberty of worship as they were understood in nineteenth-century liberal thought. That historical distinction raises an obvious question: **Did the Roman Catholic Church change its teaching on religious liberty?**

Most Catholics today answer that question by pointing to the Second Vatican Council.

Vatican II and *Dignitatis Humanae*
Between 1962 and 1965, the Roman Catholic Church convened the Second Vatican Council. Among its sixteen major documents was *Dignitatis Humanae* ("Declaration on Religious Freedom"), a document devoted entirely to the subject of religious liberty.

Its opening declaration states:
"The human person has a right to religious freedom."

The document goes on to explain that religious freedom consists in immunity from coercion by individuals, social groups, or civil authority in matters of religion.

To many readers, these statements sound remarkably similar to principles long embraced within the American constitutional tradition. At first glance, one might naturally conclude that the historical debate has been resolved. Yet the matter is more complex than it first appears.

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Development Rather Than Contradiction?
The principal debate is not primarily between Protestants and Catholics. It exists within Catholic theology itself.

Catholic theologians generally reject the suggestion that Vatican II contradicted earlier papal teaching. Instead, they argue that doctrine developed. According to Catholic theology, divine truth does not change, but the Church's understanding and application of revealed truth may develop over time. *Dignitatis Humanae* is therefore understood by Catholic scholars not as a rejection of Gregory XVI, Pius IX, or Leo XIII, but as a legitimate development of earlier teaching.

Whether one agrees with that explanation or not, the purpose of this booklet is not to resolve an internal theological debate. It is simply to recognize that the discussion exists.

Public Religion and the Authority to Define Truth
That question becomes especially relevant because Bishop Robert Barron, a member of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, frequently presents Vatican II as one of the great achievements of modern Catholicism. Barron has also argued that religion must not be reduced to merely private belief, stating:
"If you marginalized and privatized religion, democracy is in danger... That's deadly to our democracy."

In the historic Roman Catholic understanding, religion is not merely a matter of private judgment. Religious truth is authoritatively defined by the teaching office of the Church, and the individual conscience is expected to be formed by and submit to that established doctrine rather than independently determining matters of faith. Barron's concern should be understood within that theological tradition.

The American understanding of liberty of conscience begins from a different premise. The individual stands accountable to God. Thomas Jefferson wrote that religion "lies solely between Man & his God," and that the legitimate powers of government reach "actions only, and not

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opinions." Liberty of conscience therefore protects every individual from civil coercion because the conscience answers ultimately to God rather than to the civil magistrate.

If, however, religious truth is authoritatively defined by the Church, then liberty of conscience cannot simply mean that every individual is free to determine truth for himself. *The disagreement is therefore not over the importance of religion, but over the source of religious authority.*

That difference explains why Popes Gregory XVI, Pius IX, and Leo XIII rejected unrestricted liberty of conscience and liberty of worship. Their concern was not merely that religion remain public, but that religious truth not be reduced to private or individual opinion.

The question before America, therefore, is not whether religion should influence society. It always has. The question is whether liberty of conscience belongs to the individual before God, or whether civil society should increasingly recognize and support an established understanding of religious truth.

Looking Ahead

If these two understandings of religious liberty begin from different assumptions about authority, then an important constitutional question follows.

When the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission speaks of strengthening religious liberty, which understanding is it preserving?

Is it preserving the founders' conviction that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience?

Or is it moving toward a closer relationship between civil government and an established understanding of religious truth?

That is the question we now examine.

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Chapter 6 - Does the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Preserve America's Understanding of Religious Liberty?

The previous chapters have established four important principles. First, Scripture teaches that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience. Second, America's founders deliberately incorporated that principle into the Constitution after witnessing centuries of persecution produced by the union of church and state. Third, history has revealed two distinct understandings of religious liberty—one beginning with the liberty of the individual conscience before God, the other beginning with an established understanding of religious truth. Finally, we have seen that the modern discussion of religious liberty cannot be understood apart from this deeper question:

Who possesses authority to define religious truth?
The question before us is therefore straightforward. Does the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission preserve the historic American understanding of liberty of conscience, or does it redefine it? That question cannot be answered by examining motives. It must be answered by examining the Commission's own language, recommendations, and underlying assumptions.

The Commission's Central Claim
The Commission's understanding of religious liberty was expressed not only in its written report but also in the public remarks of its chairman, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, when the report was presented to President Trump.

Referring to the phrase "separation of church and state," Patrick stated: "...the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution... From this day forward, that phrase should have no power over people of all faiths ever again in America."

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This statement deserves careful consideration. Patrick is correct in one respect. The exact phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the Constitution. But that has never been the central question. The real question is whether the Constitution establishes the principle that civil government possesses limited jurisdiction in matters of religion.

As we saw in the previous chapter, America's founders answered that question with remarkable consistency. Roger Williams described a hedge separating the church from the civil power. Isaac Backus distinguished two governments that "ought never to be confounded together." John Leland insisted that government possesses no rightful authority over the conscience. Thomas Jefferson explained that the legitimate powers of government reach "actions only, and not opinions." James Madison defended the same principle, and the First Amendment embodied it in constitutional law. And they defined it as the separation of church and state.

The founders used different language, but they defended the same constitutional limitation. This booklet is not an argument for preserving Jefferson's phrase. It is an argument for preserving the constitutional principle that Jefferson's phrase describes.

With that distinction in mind, we may now examine the Commission's report itself. Perhaps no statement better illustrates the Commission's direction than its discussion of the separation of church and state. The report states:

"The concept of a 'wall of separation between church and state' can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another... Perhaps a better analogy is that religious liberty acts as a bridge between church and state." (Page 22)

At first glance this may appear to be merely a change in terminology. In reality, it represents a different constitutional philosophy. A wall establishes a jurisdictional boundary, while a bridge establishes an institutional connection. Jefferson described the legitimate powers of

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government as reaching "actions only, and not opinions." The Commission instead speaks of building a bridge between church and state. One emphasizes constitutional restraint; the other emphasizes institutional cooperation. The difference is not merely rhetorical. It reflects two different understandings of the relationship between civil government and religion.

That distinction becomes even clearer when the report's recommendations are viewed together. The Commission encourages expanded partnerships between government and faith-based organizations, broader opportunities for religious institutions to receive government funding, repeal of the Johnson Amendment, additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life, and the creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty. Each proposal may certainly be debated on its own merits. Taken together, however, they reveal a consistent direction. Religious liberty is increasingly presented not merely as protection from governmental interference, but as a framework for closer institutional cooperation between government and religion.

One important question naturally follows.

What happens when partnership requires government to make religious decisions?

Every institutional partnership requires standards. Government must determine which organizations qualify for funding, what activities deserve public support, what groups receive official recognition, and where the limits are drawn. Questions that once belonged entirely to the church gradually become questions of public administration.

History demonstrates that this is how jurisdiction slowly expands. The issue is not whether today's officials intend persecution. The issue is whether civil government gradually assumes responsibilities that previous generations believed belonged to the conscience alone. America's founders sought to prevent that progression by limiting governmental jurisdiction from the very beginning.

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At this point an important clarification is necessary. The issue is not whether religion should influence society. It should. Jesus preached publicly. The apostles preached publicly. The prophets addressed kings. Christians should proclaim the gospel, defend truth, strengthen families, care for the poor, and seek justice within their communities. America's founders never intended religion to be confined to private life.

Beyond the Commission

The Commission's recommendations do not exist in isolation. They reflect ideas that have gained increasing influence within broader religious and political circles concerning the proper relationship between Christianity and civil government.

For example, Vice President J. D. Vance has stated that his views on public policy are "pretty aligned with Catholic social teaching." He has also appeared at conferences where influential speakers argued that civil government should be shaped by biblical laws and Christian political principles rather than maintaining the historic constitutional distinction between church and state.

This is significant because Catholic social teaching has long addressed the relationship between the Church and the civil order. Pope Leo XIII, whose social encyclicals laid the foundation for modern Catholic social teaching, urged Catholics:

"All Catholics should do all in their power to cause the constitutions of states, and legislation, to be modeled on the principles of the true Church."

Whether one agrees with Pope Leo XIII or not is not the issue. The issue is that his understanding of civil government differs fundamentally from the understanding articulated by Jefferson, Madison, Backus, Leland, and the First Amendment. One envisions legislation being modeled upon the principles of the Church. The other limits civil government to its God-given jurisdiction while leaving worship and conscience entirely to God.

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The Commission's report likewise presents historical examples of government encouraging religious observance as positive precedents. In its discussion of religious liberty within the military, it approvingly cites President Abraham Lincoln's General Order calling for the orderly observance of the Sabbath within the Army and Navy. Because Lincoln's order referred to Sunday observance, the report treats governmental encouragement of religious observance as part of America's constitutional tradition rather than asking whether such measures fall within the proper jurisdiction of civil government.

Yet this is precisely the constitutional question. Is encouraging religious observance one of the civil magistrate's God-given responsibilities, or does it move civil government beyond the jurisdiction God assigned it?

None of these examples—considered individually—proves that America has abandoned its historic understanding of liberty of conscience. Viewed together, however, they point in the same direction.

Dan Patrick argues that the principle of separation should lose its influence. The Commission proposes replacing a wall with a bridge. Bishop Barron argues against reducing religion to private judgment. J. D. Vance openly embraces Catholic social teaching as a model for public policy. The Commission cites governmental encouragement of Sunday observance as part of America's constitutional tradition.

The significance of these examples is not that they are identical. It is that they all move in the same direction—away from asking where government must stop and toward asking how government can promote religion.

That represents a significant shift from the constitutional philosophy of the founders, who believed religion was strongest when civil government remained within the limits God had assigned it.

The issue is not whether religion should be public.
The issue is whether civil government should become institutionally responsible for religion.

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A free church influencing society through preaching, persuasion, education, charity, and moral example is entirely consistent with liberty of conscience. Government becoming institutionally responsible for religion is something altogether different.

Ultimately, every discussion concerning religious liberty returns to a single question:

Who possesses jurisdiction over the conscience?
Scripture answers that question by placing the conscience under God's authority alone. Jefferson answered by insisting that government reaches actions only, not opinions. The First Amendment answered by prohibiting Congress from establishing religion while protecting its free exercise. The founders consistently protected liberty by limiting governmental authority.

The Commission, however, repeatedly shifts the emphasis from constitutional restraint toward institutional cooperation between government and religion. That is why replacing the wall with a bridge is so significant. The metaphor reflects an entirely different constitutional philosophy.

History repeatedly demonstrates a remarkably consistent pattern. Churches seek governmental assistance. Government provides support. Support gradually becomes oversight. Oversight becomes regulation. Regulation becomes influence. Influence eventually reaches the conscience. This progression seldom begins with persecution. More often it begins with cooperation, mutual benefit, and the best of intentions. America's founders understood that danger. They did not establish constitutional restraints because they distrusted Christianity. They established them because they understood human nature and recognized that concentrated power, whether exercised by church or state, has a tendency to exceed its proper limits.

The Commission repeatedly asks how religion can strengthen America. That is a worthy question. A more fundamental question is this:

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How can America preserve liberty of conscience while religion continues to strengthen society?
For nearly two and a half centuries the American answer has been remarkably consistent. Religion remains entirely free. Government remains constitutionally limited. The church influences society through preaching, education, charity, and moral persuasion, while government protects that freedom without becoming religion's institutional partner.

The purpose of this booklet has never been to argue that religion should retreat from public life. Christianity should continue to influence society through faithful preaching, compassionate ministry, education, charity, and moral leadership.

The question has always been one of jurisdiction.

Who governs the conscience?

Christ answered that question before Pilate.
America's founders answered it in the Constitution.
History answered it through centuries of persecution.

The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission now asks America to reconsider it.

Every generation must decide whether civil government will remain within the limits God assigned it, or whether it will gradually assume authority over matters that belong to God alone.

The conscience belongs to God. Caesar has no rightful claim upon it.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012397

Chapter 7 -The Final Test of Liberty of Conscience

Throughout this study we have examined religious liberty from three perspectives. We began with Scripture, where Christ distinguished His kingdom from the kingdoms of this world and declared that His servants do not advance His cause through civil force. We then examined the constitutional principles embraced by America's founders, who recognized that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience. Finally, we considered the recommendations of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission and asked whether they preserve that historic understanding or move in a different direction.

These questions are important not merely because they concern constitutional history. According to Bible prophecy, they become central in the closing conflict between Christ and Satan.

From Genesis to Revelation, the great controversy has never centered merely upon politics, economics, or civil government. At its heart lies the question of worship. Who is worthy of worship? Who possesses authority over the conscience? Who determines religious truth? These questions reach their climax in Revelation 13, where worship is enforced by civil authority under the threat of economic sanctions and ultimately death. The final conflict is therefore not fundamentally political. It is a conflict over jurisdiction. Who has authority over worship? God or the state?

Jesus answered that question before Pilate:
"My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight." (John 18:36)

Throughout this booklet we have returned repeatedly to these words because they establish the biblical boundary between Christ's kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. Civil government bears the sword to preserve public order. Christ governs the conscience through truth, love, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Genuine worship cannot be compelled because it must arise from a willing heart.

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The book of Daniel illustrates this same principle. In Daniel 3, Nebuchadnezzar erected a golden image and commanded every nation to worship it under penalty of death. In Daniel 6, another decree prohibited prayer to anyone except the king. In both instances, the issue was not whether civil government existed. God Himself had ordained civil government. The issue was whether civil rulers possessed authority over worship. The faithful obeyed the king in every lawful matter, but when civil authority claimed jurisdiction over the conscience, they obeyed God rather than men.
Revelation presents the same issue on a worldwide scale. The beast receives worship. An image to the beast is formed. The second beast causes the inhabitants of the earth to worship the first beast. The prophecy is not merely predicting persecution. It is predicting the reappearance of the same governing principle that has appeared throughout history: civil authority assuming jurisdiction over worship.

An image reflects the character of the original. The medieval system united ecclesiastical authority with civil power to enforce religious conformity. Revelation predicts not merely another persecution, but the reappearance of that governing principle. Whenever civil government assumes authority over worship, the image begins to form because the same relationship between church and state has returned.

America's Providential Beginning
Ellen White understood that the rise of the United States occupied a unique place in prophecy. Before describing America's future role in Revelation 13, she first explained why the nation became such a powerful defender of liberty of conscience.

She wrote:
"Among the Christian exiles who first fled to America and sought an asylum from royal oppression and priestly intolerance were many who

DOJ-RLC Comment-012399

determined **to establish a government upon the broad foundation of civil and religious liberty**.... Freedom of religious faith was also granted, every man being permitted to worship God according to the dictates of **his conscience**.... **Republicanism and Protestantism became the fundamental principles of the nation**. These principles are the secret of its power and prosperity." *(The Great Controversy, p. 441.)*

This statement deserves careful attention. Ellen White identifies two principles that distinguished America from the nations of Europe.

Republicanism recognized that civil authority derives its just powers from the consent of the governed rather than from ecclesiastical control or hereditary monarchy.

Protestantism, in its historic sense, represented more than a collection of denominations. It embodied the great protest against the union of church and state that had dominated much of medieval Europe through the Papal church. It affirmed the supremacy of Scripture, the direct accountability of every individual to God, and the liberty of every person to worship according to the dictates of conscience without civil coercion.

Together these principles established constitutional restraints that protected liberty of conscience unlike any nation before it.

Liberty Must Be Extended to Everyone

Yet Ellen White was equally careful not to idealize America's beginnings. Although many of the early colonists came seeking freedom from religious persecution, they did not always extend that same freedom to others.

She observed:

"Yet honest and God-fearing as they were, the Pilgrims did not yet comprehend the great principle of religious toleration. The freedom which they sacrificed so much to secure for themselves, they were not equally ready to grant to others." *(The Great Controversy, p. 292.)*

DOJ-RLC Comment-012400

She then describes what happened when church and civil authority became united in the Massachusetts Bay Colony:

"The regulation was adopted by the colonists, that only church-members should have a voice in the civil government.... A kind of State church was formed... the magistrates being authorized to suppress heresy. Thus the secular power was in the hands of the church. It was not long before these measures led to the inevitable result—persecution." *(The Great Controversy, p. 293.)*

The lesson is unmistakable. Even sincere and devoted Christians can repeat the mistakes of history whenever civil government assumes authority over religion. The problem was never Christianity itself. The problem was the union of ecclesiastical authority with the coercive power of the state.

The Prophetic Warning

Having explained both America's strengths and its early failures, Ellen White then looked forward to the final crisis.

She summarized the biblical principle in these words:
"To protect liberty of conscience is the duty of the state, and this is the limit of its authority in matters of religion." *(The Great Controversy, p. 201.)*

This statement perfectly harmonizes with the teachings of Christ, the apostles, and the principles embraced by America's founders. Civil government is ordained by God, but its authority has divinely established limits. It exists to preserve justice and civil order, not to govern worship or the conscience.

Because of this principle, Ellen White repeatedly warned against every movement that would weaken the constitutional restraints protecting liberty of conscience. Writing in 1900, she declared:

"An amendment to the Constitution restricting liberty of conscience, has long been urged upon the legislators of the nation; and the question of

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enforcing Sunday observance has become one of national importance. Are we ready for the issue involved in the Sunday movement?" *(Signs of the Times, November 28, 1900.)*

It is significant that she begins, not with Sunday, but with **"an amendment to the Constitution restricting liberty of conscience."** The prophetic issue is constitutional before it is ceremonial. Sunday legislation becomes significant because it represents civil government exercising authority over worship.

Her warning becomes even more direct in *The Great Controversy*:

"Let the restraints now imposed by secular governments be removed and Rome be reinstated in her former power, and there would speedily be a revival of her tyranny and persecution." *(The Great Controversy, p. 564.)*

Throughout this booklet we have identified those restraints. They are the constitutional principles that deny civil government jurisdiction over the conscience and protect every individual's right to worship according to the dictates of conscience. Remove those restraints, and history demonstrates what follows. The issue is not merely one religious observance or another. The issue is whether civil government possesses authority to command worship.

Conclusion
This brings us back to the question that has guided this entire study.

Who possesses jurisdiction over the conscience?

Scripture answers: God.
Christ answered: God.

America's founders sought to preserve that principle by carefully limiting the jurisdiction of civil government.

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Ellen White warned that the final conflict would arise when those constitutional restraints began to disappear.

As America commemorates 250 years of constitutional government, the preservation of liberty of conscience deserves more than patriotic celebration. It deserves careful vigilance. Liberty has rarely been lost all at once. More often it has been redefined—gradually, respectfully, and with the best of intentions. The issue has never been whether religion should influence society. The issue has always been whether civil government should exercise authority over worship.

That question stood before Nebuchadnezzar.
It stood before Darius.
It stood before Pilate.
It confronted the Pilgrims as they struggled to extend the liberty they themselves had sought.

According to Revelation, it will soon stand before the entire world once again.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012403

Appendix A

Selected Statements from the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
The purpose of this appendix is to provide several representative statements from the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission and its members that are discussed throughout this booklet. They are presented so readers may examine the Commission's own language alongside the constitutional and biblical principles discussed in the preceding chapters.

1. Dan Patrick -Chairman, Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
On "Separation of Church and State"
"...the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution... From this day forward, that phrase should have no power over people of all faiths ever again in America."

2. Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Report
From a Wall to a Bridge
"The concept of a 'wall of separation between church and state' can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another... Perhaps a better analogy is that religious liberty acts as a bridge between church and state."

3. Recommendations of the Commission
Among the recommendations discussed in this booklet are:

- Expanded partnerships between government and faith-based organizations.
- Increased opportunities for religious organizations to participate in government funding.
- Repeal of the Johnson Amendment.
- Additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life.
- Creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty.

These recommendations are presented by the Commission as ways to strengthen religious liberty.

4. Bishop Robert Barron - Member, Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
On Religion in Public Life
"If you marginalized and privatized religion, democracy is in danger... Values is up to me. My gender, it's up to me. The whole structure of my life, it's my choice. That's deadly to our democracy."

Questions for the Reader
After reading the report and the statements above, consider the following questions:

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- Does the Commission define religious liberty in the same way America's founders defined it?
- Does replacing a "wall" with a "bridge" preserve the constitutional limits placed upon civil government, or does it encourage a different relationship between government and religion?
- Can government become an institutional partner with religion while remaining outside the jurisdiction of the conscience?
- How should Christians encourage religion's influence upon society while preserving the constitutional principle that civil government possesses no authority over worship?

These are the questions this booklet has sought to examine.

Appendix B
The Great Controversy over Liberty of Conscience- A Biblical and Historical Timeline
c. 605 B.C. — Daniel 3: Worship by Civil Decree
King Nebuchadnezzar erects a golden image and commands all nations to worship it under penalty of death. The issue is not civil government itself, but civil government exercising authority over worship.
c. 539 B.C. — Daniel 6: Prayer Forbidden
King Darius signs a decree prohibiting prayer to anyone except the king for thirty days. Daniel obeys the king in all lawful matters but refuses to surrender his conscience to civil authority.
A.D. 31 — Christ Before Pilate
Jesus declares: *"My kingdom is not of this world... if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight."*
Christ distinguishes His kingdom from the kingdoms of this world and establishes the biblical boundary between civil authority and the conscience.
A.D. 31 — "Render Unto Caesar"
Jesus teaches that Caesar has legitimate authority—but only within the sphere God has assigned him.
A.D. 31–33 — The Apostles Before the Sanhedrin
Peter declares: *"We ought to obey God rather than men."*
The apostles recognize the legitimacy of civil authority while affirming that God's authority over the conscience is supreme

The Development of American Religious Liberty
1636 — Roger Williams Calls for a "hedge or wall of separation" protecting the church from civil power.
1773–1774 — Isaac Backus Distinguishes the two governments ordained by God that "ought never to be confounded together."
1780s — John Leland Argues that liberty of conscience is far more than mere toleration because government possesses no rightful authority over religion.
1785 — James Madison Publishes his *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, defending liberty of conscience and arguing that religion is exempt from

DOJ-RLC Comment-012405

the authority of civil society.
1791 — The First Amendment Congress is forbidden from establishing religion while protecting its free exercise.
1790 — George Washington Promises that the United States gives "to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."
1802 — Thomas Jefferson Describes the First Amendment as building "a wall of separation between Church & State."

The Historical Debate
1832 — Gregory XVI *Mirari Vos* Rejects unrestricted liberty of conscience.
1864 — Pius IX *Quanta Cura* Describes liberty of conscience as "a most pestilential error."
1888 — Leo XIII *Libertas* Argues that unrestricted liberty of worship is not true liberty.
1965 — Vatican II *Dignitatis Humanae* Affirms immunity from coercion in religious matters while presenting this as a development of Catholic teaching. Yet, claiming not to have changed.

The Prophetic Perspective
1900 — Ellen White
Warns of efforts to amend the Constitution restricting liberty of conscience and identifies this as the beginning of the Sunday movement.

The Great Controversy
States: "To protect liberty of conscience is the duty of the state, and this is the limit of its authority in matters of religion."

She also warns: "Let the restraints now imposed by secular governments be removed... there would speedily be a revival of her tyranny and persecution."

Today -2026 — Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
The Commission recommends a "bridge" rather than a "wall" between church and state and calls for expanded institutional cooperation between government and religion, raising the constitutional questions examined throughout this booklet.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012406

TWO VISIONS.
ONE FUTURE.
THE CHOICE IS BEFORE US.
We The People
CHURCH ABOVE STATE
COMPULSION.
PERSECUTION.
LOST CONSCIENCE.
GOD ABOVE ALL CONSCIENCE BEFORE GOD LIBERTY
FREEDOM.
CONSCIENCE.
LIMITED GOVERNMENT.
WHICH FOUNDATION WILL AMERICA CHOOSE?
A BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL STUDY OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, CHURCH AND STATE, AND THE CONFLICT OF THE AGES.
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THE END IS NEAR.

From: Henry Ostrowski <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:14:47 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: From_Separation_to_Partnership_-_Addressing_the_Religious_Liberty_Commission.pdf

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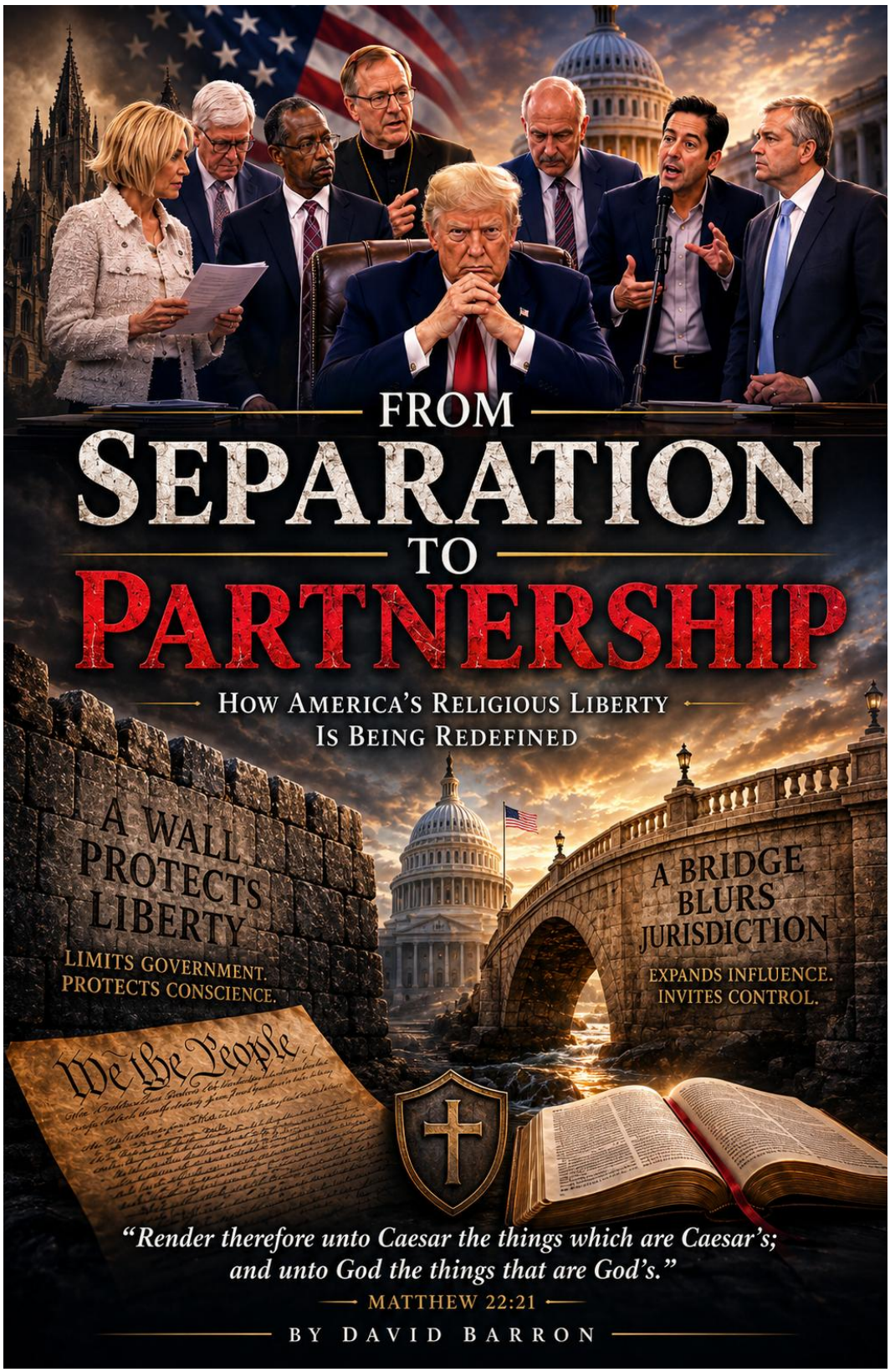
The Greatest Gift from God is Freedom of Religion.... Saturday is the Sabbath, since The Garden of Eden....
Forced Belief in not love...

Blessings,
Henry Ostrowski
Camarillo, CA


FROM
SEPARATION
TO
PARTNERSHIP
How America's Religious Liberty
Is Being Redefined
A WALL PROTECTS LIBERTY
LIMITS GOVERNMENT.
PROTECTS CONSCIENCE.
A BRIDGE BLURS JURISDICTION
EXPANDS INFLUENCE.
INVITES CONTROL.
We the People
"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's;
and unto God the things that are God's."
MATTHEW 22:21
BY DAVID BARRON

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DOJ-RLC Comment-012410

How the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Redefines Religious Liberty

The Question Before America- Introduction

For more than two centuries, the United States has understood religious liberty to rest upon a simple but profound principle. Thomas Jefferson expressed it in his famous letter to the Danbury Baptist Association:

*"Believing with you that religion is a matter which **lies solely between Man & his God**, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach **actions only, & NOT OPINIONS**."*

President Donald Trump receives the report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission at the White House. This booklet examines the Commission's recommendations in eradicating the term "separation of church and state".

Those words captured the historic American understanding of liberty of conscience. Civil government was ordained by God, but its authority was deliberately limited. It was entrusted with the responsibility of preserving justice, protecting life, and maintaining civil order. It was **not** entrusted with authority over faith, worship, or the conscience.

The issue has never been whether government is ordained by God. Scripture plainly teaches that it is. The issue has always been where God said government must stop.

The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission affirms the importance of religion and rightly recognizes the vital role faith has played in the history of the United States. Yet its recommendations represent a significant shift in emphasis. Rather than defining religious liberty primarily by the constitutional limits placed upon civil government, the Commission encourages a closer institutional relationship between

DOJ-RLC Comment-012411

government and religion. It proposes replacing the familiar "wall of separation" with a "bridge" between church and state.

This booklet argues that the question before America is not whether religion should influence society. It should. Nor is the question whether government should protect the free exercise of religion. It must.

The question is whether civil government should move beyond protecting religious liberty and begin fostering an institutional partnership with religion.

That question reaches far beyond constitutional interpretation. It touches the biblical distinction Christ established between His kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. It shaped the convictions of America's founders, influenced the framing of the First Amendment, and ultimately points forward to the final conflict over worship described in Bible prophecy.

The pages that follow examine that question from three perspectives—Scripture, history, and the Constitution, to determine whether America's historic understanding of liberty of conscience is being preserved or redefined.

The conscience is not outside God's government—it is outside Caesar's.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012412

Chapter One - Liberty of Conscience Begins with God

Religious liberty is not first a constitutional principle. **It is a biblical principle.**

Long before legislatures enacted laws, before nations drafted constitutions, and before courts interpreted rights, God established the proper relationship between His kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. The distinction between civil authority and the conscience did not originate with Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Roger Williams, or any other statesman. It originated with Jesus Christ.

One of the clearest statements ever made concerning that distinction occurred while Jesus stood before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Accused of claiming to be a king, Jesus answered:

"My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence." (John 18:36)

This declaration establishes the foundation upon which every discussion of religious liberty must rest. Christ was not denying the legitimacy of civil government. He was defining its jurisdiction.

In fact, only a few verses later Jesus acknowledged that Pilate's authority had been given "from above" (John 19:11). Civil government has a legitimate place within God's order. Yet Christ made it unmistakably clear that His kingdom operates upon entirely different principles.

Earthly governments preserve civil order. They enact laws, punish crime, defend innocent life, and bear the sword against evildoers. Christ's kingdom advances in another way. It governs not by civil force, but by truth, conviction, love, and the work of the Holy Spirit upon the conscience. It never compels genuine faith by civil power.

Jesus explained the difference in a single sentence:

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"If My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight."

Earthly kingdoms ultimately rely upon force to maintain their authority. Christ's kingdom does not. Faith produced by coercion is not faith at all. A government may compel outward actions, but it cannot produce love for God. It may punish crime, but it cannot create holiness. It may command attendance, but it cannot command worship. Worship belongs to another kingdom.

Christ's words establish the biblical foundation of liberty of conscience. His kingdom does not spread by the sword of Caesar but by the power of truth working upon willing hearts.

The Two Jurisdictions
Jesus reinforced this principle when asked whether taxes should be paid to Caesar. Holding up a coin, He answered:

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21)

With these few words, Christ established two distinct jurisdictions. Caesar possesses legitimate authority. God possesses supreme authority. The question is not whether government has authority. Scripture plainly teaches that it does. The question is **what authority God has entrusted to it.**

Worship belongs to God. Faith belongs to God. Conscience belongs to God. No earthly ruler may rightfully claim what belongs exclusively to the Creator. Whenever civil government attempts to prescribe doctrine, direct worship, or compel religious belief, it reaches beyond the authority God has granted it. Those things belong to **God's jurisdiction** alone.

God Ordained Civil Government
The Bible does not teach anarchy. The Apostle Paul wrote:

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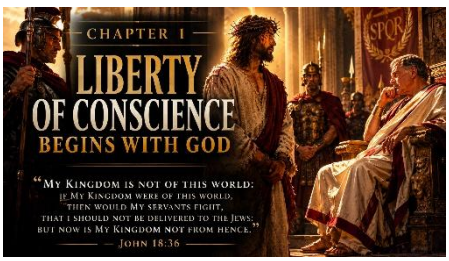
"For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." (Romans 13:1)

Civil government is God's servant for the preservation of society. Paul explains that rulers are appointed to reward those who do good and punish those who do evil. They "bear not the sword in vain," for they are "the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:4).

The sword is a civil instrument. It exists to restrain violence, protect innocent life, punish crime, and preserve public order. It was never given to enforce faith, determine doctrine, compel worship, or govern the conscience. God entrusted civil rulers with authority over civil matters—not over the conscience.



Romans 13 establishes both the authority and the limits of civil government. The magistrate bears the sword to preserve civil order and punish those who commit outward acts of evil. Yet nowhere does Scripture authorize civil government to compel worship, prescribe doctrine, or govern the heart. Those belong to God's jurisdiction alone. Civil rulers judge outward conduct; God alone judges the heart.

This distinction is essential. Not every sin falls within the jurisdiction of civil government. God condemns pride, covetousness, lust, hatred, envy, unbelief, idolatry, and every sinful thought of the heart. These are violations of God's moral law, yet they are not crimes that the civil magistrate is authorized to punish. No government can imprison a man for coveting his neighbor's house, fine him for pride, or sentence him for hatred in his heart. These sins are real, and God will judge them, but He has reserved that judgment to Himself.

Civil government is ordained to punish outward acts that violate the rights and safety of others—murder, theft, fraud, violence, and similar

DOJ-RLC Comment-012415

offenses. It was never commissioned to enforce the whole of God's moral law. If it were, the magistrate would be required to punish every violation of the Ten Commandments, including idolatry, unbelief, covetousness, and every sinful desire of the heart. Furthermore, with the punishment of death. We would all be guilty. (Romans 3:19) Scripture gives no such authority.

This is the distinction of jurisdiction. God ordained civil government to restrain outward acts that disturb the peace and safety of society. He never entrusted it with authority over worship, faith, repentance, doctrine, or the conscience. Those remain under His government alone.

The Limits of Civil Authority
The apostles themselves recognized this distinction. When commanded by the Jewish authorities to stop preaching Christ, Peter answered:

"We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

Peter did not deny the legitimacy of civil government, nor did he call for rebellion. He simply recognized that civil authority has limits. Whenever earthly rulers command what God forbids, or forbid what God commands, the jurisdiction of Caesar has ended and the jurisdiction of God remains supreme.

This is the very essence of liberty of conscience. No government possesses the authority to stand between God and the individual soul.

Faith Cannot Be Forced
Throughout Scripture, God appeals to mankind through persuasion rather than coercion.

Moses pleaded: *"I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life."* (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Joshua challenged Israel: *"Choose you this day whom ye will serve."* (Joshua 24:15)

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Paul wrote: *"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* (Romans 10:17)

Again he declared: *"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men."* (2 Corinthians 5:11)

The biblical pattern is unmistakable. God reveals truth. He invites. He warns. He pleads. He persuades. He never produces genuine worship through civil compulsion. If the Almighty Himself does not force the conscience, no earthly government has the right to do so.

Conclusion

The Scriptures establish two governments, each ordained by God for a distinct purpose. Civil government exists to preserve justice, punish wrongdoing, and protect society. It governs outward conduct. Christ's kingdom governs the heart, transforming the conscience through truth, love, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Confusing these two jurisdictions has produced some of the darkest chapters in human history. Whenever the church has sought the sword of the state, or the state has assumed authority over the conscience, liberty has suffered and religion has been corrupted. The chapters that follow will demonstrate how this biblical principle profoundly influenced the development of religious liberty in America, shaped the thinking of the nation's founders, and remains the defining issue in the ongoing debate over the proper relationship between church and state.

Biblical religious liberty is therefore far more than a constitutional principle. It is a divine principle established by Christ Himself.

Civil government is ordained by God, but it was never ordained to govern the conscience. The conscience belongs to God. Caesar has no rightful claim upon it.

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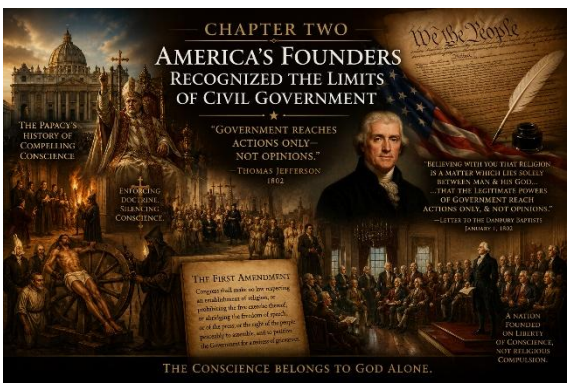
Chapter 2 - America's Founders Recognized the Limits of Civil Government

The principle of liberty of conscience did not begin with America's founders. As we saw in the previous chapter, it began with Jesus Christ Himself, who distinguished His kingdom from the kingdoms of this world and taught that what belongs to God must never be claimed by Caesar.

The founders of the United States did not invent this principle. Rather, they recognized it after centuries of painful experience and sought to preserve it in the constitutional system they established.

The American experiment in religious liberty was born from HISTORY For centuries, Europe witnessed repeated attempts to enforce religious conformity through civil power. Kings legislated doctrine. Magistrates enforced religious decrees. Churches relied upon the sword of the state to preserve orthodoxy, while governments relied upon religious institutions to strengthen political authority.

The result was not religious unity. It was persecution, imprisonment, confiscation of property, exile, torture, and death. America's founders knew this history well, and they were determined not to repeat it.



Roger Williams
Long before the American Revolution, Roger Williams recognized the danger of uniting church and state. A Puritan minister in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Williams believed that civil government had no authority over matters of faith and conscience. His convictions brought him into direct conflict with the colony's leaders, who believed the civil magistrate should help

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preserve religious uniformity. In 1635, Williams was banished from Massachusetts because of these convictions.

After establishing the colony of Rhode Island, he sought to build a society where liberty of conscience would be protected and civil government would exercise no authority over worship.

Describing the proper relationship between church and state, Williams wrote of: *"...the hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wilderness of the world."*

Williams' concern was not to protect the government from religion. It was to protect the church from the corrupting influence of civil power. He understood that once the civil magistrate entered the affairs of religion, both institutions would suffer. The church would gradually lose its spiritual independence, while the state would become entangled in matters that belonged to God alone.

Isaac Backus
A century later, Baptist minister Isaac Backus continued the same argument. Opposing the establishment of religion by civil government, he wrote:
"God has appointed two kinds of government in the world, which are in their nature and ought never to be confounded together."

Backus understood what Christ had taught centuries earlier. God ordained civil government to preserve justice and order, but He never gave it authority over faith or worship. To confuse those two governments was to violate the jurisdiction God Himself had established.

The language differs from Christ's teaching about rendering unto Caesar and unto God, but the principle is identical. There are two governments, two jurisdictions, and each must remain within the sphere God has assigned it.

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John Leland
John Leland, who greatly influenced James Madison regarding the first amendment carried this principle even further. A close friend of James Madison and an influential Baptist minister during the debates surrounding the Constitution, Leland insisted that liberty of conscience was more than mere toleration.

He wrote: *"The liberty I contend for is more than toleration. The very idea of toleration is despicable."*

Leland understood that toleration assumes government possesses authority over religion and merely chooses not to exercise it. Liberty of conscience rests upon an entirely different foundation. Government has no rightful jurisdiction over the conscience in the first place.

Leland also warned: *"The notion of a Christian commonwealth should be exploded forever."*

He was not arguing against Christianity influencing society. Rather, he rejected the idea that civil government should assume responsibility for enforcing Christianity.

Thomas Jefferson
Perhaps no founder expressed this principle more clearly than Thomas Jefferson. Writing to the Danbury Baptist Association on January 1, 1802, Jefferson declared:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions."

Jefferson did not merely defend religious tolerance. He identified the proper jurisdiction of civil government. Government may regulate actions affecting civil society, but it has no jurisdiction over faith, worship, or conscience. That authority belongs to God alone.

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Years earlier, Jefferson reflected upon Europe's history with these sobering words:
"Millions of innocent men, women, and children... have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch toward uniformity."

His conclusion was unmistakable. Civil force had failed to produce genuine faith. Instead, it had produced centuries of suffering.

James Madison
James Madison shared the same conviction. Often called the "Father of the Constitution," he became one of America's strongest defenders of liberty of conscience. Reflecting upon Europe's long history of religious persecution, Madison wrote:
"The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."

Madison was not speaking in the abstract. He was looking back upon centuries in which civil governments enforced religious conformity through the power of the state. Throughout much of the Middle Ages and beyond, church and civil authorities worked together to suppress what they regarded as heresy. The result was imprisonment, torture, confiscation of property, exile, and death.

Both Madison and Jefferson reached the same conclusion. Civil force cannot produce genuine faith. Instead of preserving religion, it corrupts both the church and the state. Whether expressed as "separation," "liberty of conscience," or the "free exercise" of religion, the principle remained the same. Civil government was never intended to govern religion. Its duty is to protect every person's liberty to worship God—or to decline worship—according to the dictates of conscience, without coercion from the state.

George Washington
America's first president expressed the practical result of these principles in his famous letter to the Hebrew Congregation at Newport

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in 1790:
"The Government of the United States... gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."

Washington did not speak merely of toleration. He envisioned a nation in which citizens of every faith could worship freely because government neither established religion nor persecuted those who differed.

The Constitution would not create religious liberty. Rather, it would protect the liberty of conscience that belongs to every person as a gift from God.

The First Amendment
These principles found expression in the First Amendment to the Constitution:
"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

Notice that the Amendment accomplishes two complementary purposes. First, it prevents the civil government from establishing religion. Second, it protects the free exercise of religion. These are not competing ideas, they are inseparable. Government refrains from exercising authority over religion precisely so that religion may remain free.

The freedom of the church depends upon the restraint of the state.

Is "Separation of Church and State" in the Constitution?
One objection frequently raised today is that the phrase "separation of church and state" never appears in the Constitution. That observation is correct. The exact phrase is not found in the Constitution. But the question is not whether Jefferson's particular wording appears. The question is whether the principle appears.

The First Amendment declares:

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"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

Those words establish two complementary principles. Civil government may not establish religion, and it may not interfere with the free exercise of religion. Thomas Jefferson later described this constitutional arrangement as building **"a wall of separation between Church & State."** He was not inventing a new constitutional doctrine. He was describing the practical effect of the First Amendment.

Jefferson was not alone. James Madison defended the same principle. Roger Williams described a hedge or wall separating the church from the wilderness of the world. Isaac Backus spoke of two governments that "ought never to be confounded together." John Leland insisted that government possesses no rightful authority over the conscience. Though they expressed the idea differently, they defended the same constitutional principle: **civil government possesses no jurisdiction over religion because the conscience belongs to God.**

The issue, therefore, is not whether Jefferson's particular phrase appears in the Constitution. The issue is whether the Constitution limits civil government in matters of religion.

It plainly does.

Protecting Both Church and State

One of the greatest misunderstandings surrounding the phrase *"separation of church and state"* is the assumption that it was designed either to exclude religion from public life or merely to protect government from religious influence. The founders understood the issue differently. They believed that God had ordained both civil government and the church, but had entrusted each with a different jurisdiction.

History had repeatedly demonstrated the danger of confusing those jurisdictions. Whenever the church sought the power of the state, it gained political influence but lost its spiritual independence. Whenever

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the state assumed authority over religion, it became entangled in matters of faith and conscience that God had never entrusted to it. The result was not liberty, but persecution.

Roger Williams sought to preserve the church from the corrupting influence of civil power. Isaac Backus distinguished the two governments that God had ordained and insisted they must never be confounded. John Leland rejected mere toleration because he believed government possessed no rightful authority over the conscience. Thomas Jefferson limited the legitimate powers of government to "actions only, and not opinions." James Madison sought to spare America the religious bloodshed that had soaked the soil of Europe for centuries. George Washington envisioned a nation that would "give to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."

Though each expressed the principle in different language, they defended the same fundamental truth: civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience. By keeping church and state within their God-given spheres, they sought to preserve the independence of both institutions. The church would remain free to proclaim truth without relying upon civil power, and the government would remain free from assuming authority over worship, doctrine, or faith. In protecting liberty of conscience, they protected both the church and the state from exercising authority that belonged only to God.

Conclusion

America's founders did not establish liberty of conscience because they distrusted religion. They established it because they understood both Scripture and history. They recognized that Christ's kingdom advances through truth rather than force, and they deliberately limited the jurisdiction of civil government to preserve that principle.

For nearly 250 years, this understanding of liberty of conscience has distinguished the United States from the systems that preceded it. The question now before the nation is whether that historic understanding will be preserved, or fundamentally redefined.

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Chapter 3 -Religious Liberty Redefined

"The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." — Thomas Jefferson

A New Direction
The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission was established to examine the state of religious liberty in America and recommend ways to strengthen it. At first glance, many of its recommendations appear commendable. The report affirms the importance of religion, recognizes the indispensable role faith has played throughout American history, and calls for protecting the free exercise of religion. Every Christian should welcome sincere efforts to preserve the freedom to worship God according to the dictates of conscience.

The question before us, however, is not whether religious liberty should be protected. The question is **how the Commission defines religious liberty.** Throughout history, liberty has seldom disappeared by being openly abolished. More often it has been redefined until the original principle is scarcely recognized.

For nearly 250 years, the American understanding of religious liberty rested upon a simple constitutional principle: **civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience.** Government protected religious liberty precisely because it limited its own authority. The Commission proposes a different emphasis.

Rather than focusing primarily upon the constitutional limits of civil authority, the report repeatedly encourages a closer relationship between government and religious institutions. That shift becomes especially clear in its discussion of the historic concept of the separation of church and state.

The report states:
"The concept of a 'wall of separation between church and state' can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another... Perhaps a better analogy is that religious liberty acts as a bridge between church and state."

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This statement deserves careful consideration because metaphors reveal assumptions. A wall establishes a boundary. A bridge establishes a connection. A wall limits jurisdiction. A bridge facilitates cooperation. Whether one prefers Jefferson's terminology or another expression, the historic American principle remained the same: civil government protects religious liberty by recognizing the limits of its own authority. The Commission's proposed metaphor points in a different direction.

From Protection to Partnership

That change in emphasis is reflected throughout the Commission's report. It recommends expanded cooperation with faith-based organizations, broader opportunities for religious organizations to receive government funding, repeal of the Johnson Amendment, additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life, the creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty, and even points to historical examples of governmental encouragement of Sabbath observance as positive precedents.

Each recommendation may be evaluated on its own merits. Taken together, however, they reveal a consistent shift in emphasis. For nearly two and a half centuries, America's understanding of religious liberty sought to preserve liberty of conscience by carefully limiting the jurisdiction of civil government in matters of religion. The Commission increasingly presents religious liberty not simply as protection from governmental interference, but as a framework for closer institutional cooperation between government and religion.

That distinction is more significant than it first appears. The historic American question was, "Where has God placed the limits of civil authority?" The Commission increasingly asks, "How can government and religion work together to strengthen society?" Those are fundamentally different questions. One preserves liberty by recognizing constitutional limits. The other encourages a closer institutional relationship between government and religion.

History demonstrates why that distinction matters. Once government becomes a partner with religion, it cannot avoid making religious

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judgments. It must determine which organizations qualify for public support, which religious practices deserve official recognition, and where the limits are to be drawn. The Commission's favorable reference to Abraham Lincoln's order encouraging Sabbath observance illustrates how quickly these questions move from protecting religious liberty to government encouraging religious practice. Whether future generations apply that principle more broadly, including questions surrounding Sunday observance, is a question Americans should not dismiss lightly.

Whether that shift ultimately strengthens religious liberty or gradually expands the role of civil government in religious affairs is the central question examined throughout this booklet.

Public Religion Is Not the Issue

At this point an important clarification is necessary. Nothing in this discussion suggests that religion should be confined to private life. Scripture teaches the opposite. Jesus preached publicly. The apostles preached publicly. The prophets addressed kings. Christians are called to proclaim the gospel, defend truth, care for the poor, pursue justice, and bear witness before rulers and nations.

The issue has never been whether religion should influence society. The issue is whether civil government should become institutionally involved in religion. Those are fundamentally different questions. A free church should influence the nation through persuasion, preaching, and faithful witness. A constitutional government should protect that freedom without assuming authority over religion itself.

The Question of Jurisdiction

Ultimately, every discussion concerning religious liberty returns to a single question:

What authority has God entrusted to civil government?

Scripture answers that question clearly. Civil government exists to preserve order, protect life, restrain violence, and punish crime. Worship, doctrine, faith, and conscience belong to another jurisdiction, and it is the duty of the civil government to protect the freedom of it.

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History repeatedly demonstrates what happens when that distinction is forgotten. Governments that begin by supporting religion eventually find themselves deciding religious questions. Which beliefs qualify for protection? Which religious organizations deserve public support? Which doctrines fall outside acceptable limits? Who determines what constitutes heresy? These questions are unavoidable whenever civil authority crosses into matters of conscience.

That is precisely the danger America's founders sought to prevent.

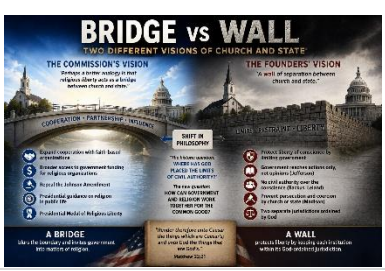
Why This Matters

The issue before America is therefore much larger than a disagreement over a metaphor. The question is whether the constitutional principle that protected liberty of conscience is being quietly redefined.

Replacing a wall with a bridge may sound harmless, but history teaches that liberty is rarely lost in a single dramatic moment. More often it is surrendered gradually, one definition at a time, one principle at a time, until the original safeguards are scarcely recognized.

If America's understanding of religious liberty shifts from protecting the conscience by limiting civil jurisdiction to encouraging institutional alliance between government and religion, then America has begun moving away from the constitutional principles that distinguished it from the Old World.

Before determining whether that shift represents progress or departure, we must first recognize that history itself presents two very different understandings of religious liberty. One sought to preserve liberty by limiting the authority of civil government in matters of religion. The other envisioned a closer relationship between civil authority and religious truth. Understanding those two models is essential before evaluating the direction America is now taking.



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Chapter 4 -Two Competing Historical Understandings of Religious Liberty

By the close of the eighteenth century, the United States had embraced a principle that distinguished it from nearly every nation in the world. Civil government would possess no jurisdiction over the conscience. Religion would neither be established by Congress nor prohibited by Congress, and the free exercise of religion would be protected because the conscience belonged to God alone.

This understanding did not arise in a vacuum. It emerged after centuries of conflict over the relationship between civil government and religion. To appreciate the significance of America's constitutional system, it is necessary to compare it with another historical understanding of religious liberty that prevailed throughout much of Europe for centuries. This comparison is not intended to criticize individuals or denominations. It is simply an examination of two different historical models.

The American Model

The American understanding of religious liberty rested upon one fundamental principle: **civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience.** As we have seen, this conviction was championed by Roger Williams, Isaac Backus, John Leland, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and ultimately embodied in the First Amendment. Though each expressed the principle differently, they agreed that the authority of civil government reached only its proper sphere.

Thomas Jefferson summarized that principle with remarkable clarity when he wrote:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions."

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Jefferson's distinction is both simple and profound. Government reaches actions, not opinions, worship, or conscience. Those belong to God alone.

James Madison expressed the same concern when reflecting upon the religious wars that had devastated Europe:
"The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."

These convictions found constitutional expression in the First Amendment, which prohibited Congress from establishing religion while protecting its free exercise. Under this model, religion remained free because civil government remained limited. The state's responsibility was not to determine religious truth but to protect every citizen's liberty of conscience.

The Historical Papal Model
For many centuries, the relationship between church and civil government developed differently throughout much of Catholic Europe. Rather than treating religion solely as a matter beyond civil jurisdiction, influential papal documents taught that civil society owed duties toward the true religion.

Pope Gregory XVI, writing in *Mirari Vos* (1832), rejected unrestricted liberty of conscience in some of the strongest language of the nineteenth century. Referring to what he viewed as religious indifferentism, he wrote:

"From this poisoned source of indifferentism flows that absurd and erroneous proposition, or rather delirium, that liberty of conscience must be asserted and vindicated for everyone."

Pope Pius IX reaffirmed the same position in *Quanta Cura* (1864), describing liberty of conscience as **"a most pestilential error."**

Pope Leo XIII continued this line of thought in *Libertas* (1888), writing:

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"Let us examine that liberty in individuals which is so opposed to the virtue of religion... A liberty such as we have described... is no liberty, but is degradation."

These statements did not deny the importance of religion. Rather, they reflected a different understanding of the relationship between civil authority and religious truth. Whereas Jefferson argued that religion lies solely between man and God, these papal documents maintained that civil society possesses obligations toward what it understands to be the true religion.

Civil Government and Religious Truth

The difference between these two systems extended beyond abstract principles. Throughout much of European history, civil rulers frequently assisted ecclesiastical authorities in suppressing heresy, enforcing religious conformity, and protecting what was regarded as the true faith. Likewise, church authorities often appealed to civil rulers to carry out judgments that the Church itself could not enforce through spiritual authority alone.

These arrangements varied considerably across countries and centuries, and their legal details changed over time. Nevertheless, they reflected a broader understanding that civil government and ecclesiastical authority could cooperate in matters concerning religion.

By contrast, the American constitutional model deliberately denied civil government jurisdiction over religious doctrine while protecting the liberty of every individual's conscience. The distinction was not merely practical. It represented two fundamentally different understandings of the relationship between church and state.

Two Different Starting Points

Although both systems acknowledged the importance of religion, they began from fundamentally different assumptions.

The American system asked, **What authority has God withheld from civil government?** Its answer was straightforward: **the conscience.** Civil

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government possesses legitimate authority over civil society, but worship, faith, and doctrine remain under God's jurisdiction alone.

The historical European model more often asked, **What duties does civil government owe toward the true religion?** Its answer generally included some form of cooperation between civil authority and religious truth as understood by the Church. Those different starting points produced two distinct understandings of religious liberty.

Why This Comparison Matters

The purpose of this chapter has not been to determine which historical model was correct. It has simply been to establish that two very different understandings of religious liberty existed. One limited civil government to its God-ordained jurisdiction and sought to protect liberty of conscience by restricting governmental authority.

Recognizing that distinction is essential before examining more recent developments. If America's understanding of religious liberty has remained unchanged, then contemporary discussions should reflect the same constitutional limits recognized by the founders. If, however, that understanding has changed, Americans should carefully examine how, why, and with what consequences.

If these two historical models differed so fundamentally, an obvious question arises: Has that difference disappeared, or has it simply been redefined?

To answer that question, we must examine the modern understanding of religious liberty and ask whether it represents a continuation of America's constitutional tradition, a development within Catholic thought, or the emergence of an entirely new relationship between church and state.

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Chapter 5- Vatican II and the Modern Understanding of Religious Liberty

The previous chapter demonstrated that two distinct historical understandings of religious liberty existed for centuries. America's founders understood liberty of conscience to mean that civil government possessed no jurisdiction over matters of faith and worship. Religion belonged to God, while government exercised authority only over civil affairs.

Historical Roman Catholic teaching approached the question differently. As we have seen, Popes Gregory XVI, Pius IX, and Leo XIII each criticized principles associated with unrestricted liberty of conscience and liberty of worship as they were understood in nineteenth-century liberal thought. That historical distinction raises an obvious question: **Did the Roman Catholic Church change its teaching on religious liberty?**

Most Catholics today answer that question by pointing to the Second Vatican Council.

Vatican II and *Dignitatis Humanae*
Between 1962 and 1965, the Roman Catholic Church convened the Second Vatican Council. Among its sixteen major documents was *Dignitatis Humanae* ("Declaration on Religious Freedom"), a document devoted entirely to the subject of religious liberty.

Its opening declaration states:
"The human person has a right to religious freedom."

The document goes on to explain that religious freedom consists in immunity from coercion by individuals, social groups, or civil authority in matters of religion.

To many readers, these statements sound remarkably similar to principles long embraced within the American constitutional tradition. At first glance, one might naturally conclude that the historical debate has been resolved. Yet the matter is more complex than it first appears.

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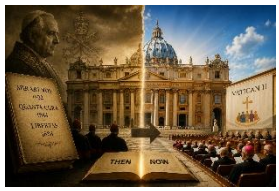
Development Rather Than Contradiction?



The principal debate is not primarily between Protestants and Catholics. It exists within Catholic theology itself.

Catholic theologians generally reject the suggestion that Vatican II contradicted earlier papal teaching. Instead, they argue that doctrine developed. According to Catholic theology, divine truth does not change, but the Church's understanding and application of revealed truth may develop over time. *Dignitatis Humanae* is therefore understood by Catholic scholars not as a rejection of Gregory XVI, Pius IX, or Leo XIII, but as a legitimate development of earlier teaching.

Whether one agrees with that explanation or not, the purpose of this booklet is not to resolve an internal theological debate. It is simply to recognize that the discussion exists.

Public Religion and the Authority to Define Truth

That question becomes especially relevant because Bishop Robert Barron, a member of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, frequently presents Vatican II as one of the great achievements of modern Catholicism. Barron has also argued that religion must not be reduced to merely private belief, stating:
"If you marginalized and privatized religion, democracy is in danger... That's deadly to our democracy."

In the historic Roman Catholic understanding, religion is not merely a matter of private judgment. Religious truth is authoritatively defined by the teaching office of the Church, and the individual conscience is expected to be formed by and submit to that established doctrine rather than independently determining matters of faith. Barron's concern should be understood within that theological tradition.

The American understanding of liberty of conscience begins from a different premise. The individual stands accountable to God. Thomas Jefferson wrote that religion "lies solely between Man & his God," and that the legitimate powers of government reach "actions only, and not

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opinions." Liberty of conscience therefore protects every individual from civil coercion because the conscience answers ultimately to God rather than to the civil magistrate.

If, however, religious truth is authoritatively defined by the Church, then liberty of conscience cannot simply mean that every individual is free to determine truth for himself. *The disagreement is therefore not over the importance of religion, but over the source of religious authority.*

That difference explains why Popes Gregory XVI, Pius IX, and Leo XIII rejected unrestricted liberty of conscience and liberty of worship. Their concern was not merely that religion remain public, but that religious truth not be reduced to private or individual opinion.

The question before America, therefore, is not whether religion should influence society. It always has. The question is whether liberty of conscience belongs to the individual before God, or whether civil society should increasingly recognize and support an established understanding of religious truth.

Looking Ahead

If these two understandings of religious liberty begin from different assumptions about authority, then an important constitutional question follows.

When the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission speaks of strengthening religious liberty, which understanding is it preserving?

Is it preserving the founders' conviction that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience?

Or is it moving toward a closer relationship between civil government and an established understanding of religious truth?

That is the question we now examine.

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Chapter 6 - Does the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Preserve America's Understanding of Religious Liberty?

The previous chapters have established four important principles. First, Scripture teaches that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience. Second, America's founders deliberately incorporated that principle into the Constitution after witnessing centuries of persecution produced by the union of church and state. Third, history has revealed two distinct understandings of religious liberty—one beginning with the liberty of the individual conscience before God, the other beginning with an established understanding of religious truth. Finally, we have seen that the modern discussion of religious liberty cannot be understood apart from this deeper question:

Who possesses authority to define religious truth?
The question before us is therefore straightforward. Does the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission preserve the historic American understanding of liberty of conscience, or does it redefine it? That question cannot be answered by examining motives. It must be answered by examining the Commission's own language, recommendations, and underlying assumptions.

The Commission's Central Claim
The Commission's understanding of religious liberty was expressed not only in its written report but also in the public remarks of its chairman, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, when the report was presented to President Trump.

Referring to the phrase "separation of church and state," Patrick stated: "...the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution... From this day forward, that phrase should have no power over people of all faiths ever again in America."

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This statement deserves careful consideration. Patrick is correct in one respect. The exact phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the Constitution. But that has never been the central question. The real question is whether the Constitution establishes the principle that civil government possesses limited jurisdiction in matters of religion.

As we saw in the previous chapter, America's founders answered that question with remarkable consistency. Roger Williams described a hedge separating the church from the civil power. Isaac Backus distinguished two governments that "ought never to be confounded together." John Leland insisted that government possesses no rightful authority over the conscience. Thomas Jefferson explained that the legitimate powers of government reach "actions only, and not opinions." James Madison defended the same principle, and the First Amendment embodied it in constitutional law. And they defined it as the separation of church and state.

The founders used different language, but they defended the same constitutional limitation. This booklet is not an argument for preserving Jefferson's phrase. It is an argument for preserving the constitutional principle that Jefferson's phrase describes.

With that distinction in mind, we may now examine the Commission's report itself. Perhaps no statement better illustrates the Commission's direction than its discussion of the separation of church and state. The report states:

"The concept of a 'wall of separation between church and state' can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another... Perhaps a better analogy is that religious liberty acts as a bridge between church and state." (Page 22)

At first glance this may appear to be merely a change in terminology. In reality, it represents a different constitutional philosophy. A wall establishes a jurisdictional boundary, while a bridge establishes an institutional connection. Jefferson described the legitimate powers of

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government as reaching "actions only, and not opinions." The Commission instead speaks of building a bridge between church and state. One emphasizes constitutional restraint; the other emphasizes institutional cooperation. The difference is not merely rhetorical. It reflects two different understandings of the relationship between civil government and religion.

That distinction becomes even clearer when the report's recommendations are viewed together. The Commission encourages expanded partnerships between government and faith-based organizations, broader opportunities for religious institutions to receive government funding, repeal of the Johnson Amendment, additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life, and the creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty. Each proposal may certainly be debated on its own merits. Taken together, however, they reveal a consistent direction. Religious liberty is increasingly presented not merely as protection from governmental interference, but as a framework for closer institutional cooperation between government and religion.

One important question naturally follows.

What happens when partnership requires government to make religious decisions?

Every institutional partnership requires standards. Government must determine which organizations qualify for funding, what activities deserve public support, what groups receive official recognition, and where the limits are drawn. Questions that once belonged entirely to the church gradually become questions of public administration.

History demonstrates that this is how jurisdiction slowly expands. The issue is not whether today's officials intend persecution. The issue is whether civil government gradually assumes responsibilities that previous generations believed belonged to the conscience alone. America's founders sought to prevent that progression by limiting governmental jurisdiction from the very beginning.

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At this point an important clarification is necessary. The issue is not whether religion should influence society. It should. Jesus preached publicly. The apostles preached publicly. The prophets addressed kings. Christians should proclaim the gospel, defend truth, strengthen families, care for the poor, and seek justice within their communities. America's founders never intended religion to be confined to private life.

Beyond the Commission

The Commission's recommendations do not exist in isolation. They reflect ideas that have gained increasing influence within broader religious and political circles concerning the proper relationship between Christianity and civil government.

For example, Vice President J. D. Vance has stated that his views on public policy are "pretty aligned with Catholic social teaching." He has also appeared at conferences where influential speakers argued that civil government should be shaped by biblical laws and Christian political principles rather than maintaining the historic constitutional distinction between church and state.

This is significant because Catholic social teaching has long addressed the relationship between the Church and the civil order. Pope Leo XIII, whose social encyclicals laid the foundation for modern Catholic social teaching, urged Catholics:

"All Catholics should do all in their power to cause the constitutions of states, and legislation, to be modeled on the principles of the true Church."

Whether one agrees with Pope Leo XIII or not is not the issue. The issue is that his understanding of civil government differs fundamentally from the understanding articulated by Jefferson, Madison, Backus, Leland, and the First Amendment. One envisions legislation being modeled upon the principles of the Church. The other limits civil government to its God-given jurisdiction while leaving worship and conscience entirely to God.

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The Commission's report likewise presents historical examples of government encouraging religious observance as positive precedents. In its discussion of religious liberty within the military, it approvingly cites President Abraham Lincoln's General Order calling for the orderly observance of the Sabbath within the Army and Navy. Because Lincoln's order referred to Sunday observance, the report treats governmental encouragement of religious observance as part of America's constitutional tradition rather than asking whether such measures fall within the proper jurisdiction of civil government.

Yet this is precisely the constitutional question. Is encouraging religious observance one of the civil magistrate's God-given responsibilities, or does it move civil government beyond the jurisdiction God assigned it?

None of these examples—considered individually—proves that America has abandoned its historic understanding of liberty of conscience. Viewed together, however, they point in the same direction.

Dan Patrick argues that the principle of separation should lose its influence. The Commission proposes replacing a wall with a bridge. Bishop Barron argues against reducing religion to private judgment. J. D. Vance openly embraces Catholic social teaching as a model for public policy. The Commission cites governmental encouragement of Sunday observance as part of America's constitutional tradition.

The significance of these examples is not that they are identical. It is that they all move in the same direction—away from asking where government must stop and toward asking how government can promote religion.

That represents a significant shift from the constitutional philosophy of the founders, who believed religion was strongest when civil government remained within the limits God had assigned it.

The issue is not whether religion should be public.
The issue is whether civil government should become institutionally responsible for religion.

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A free church influencing society through preaching, persuasion, education, charity, and moral example is entirely consistent with liberty of conscience. Government becoming institutionally responsible for religion is something altogether different.

Ultimately, every discussion concerning religious liberty returns to a single question:

Who possesses jurisdiction over the conscience?
Scripture answers that question by placing the conscience under God's authority alone. Jefferson answered by insisting that government reaches actions only, not opinions. The First Amendment answered by prohibiting Congress from establishing religion while protecting its free exercise. The founders consistently protected liberty by limiting governmental authority.

The Commission, however, repeatedly shifts the emphasis from constitutional restraint toward institutional cooperation between government and religion. That is why replacing the wall with a bridge is so significant. The metaphor reflects an entirely different constitutional philosophy.

History repeatedly demonstrates a remarkably consistent pattern. Churches seek governmental assistance. Government provides support. Support gradually becomes oversight. Oversight becomes regulation. Regulation becomes influence. Influence eventually reaches the conscience. This progression seldom begins with persecution. More often it begins with cooperation, mutual benefit, and the best of intentions. America's founders understood that danger. They did not establish constitutional restraints because they distrusted Christianity. They established them because they understood human nature and recognized that concentrated power, whether exercised by church or state, has a tendency to exceed its proper limits.

The Commission repeatedly asks how religion can strengthen America. That is a worthy question. A more fundamental question is this:

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How can America preserve liberty of conscience while religion continues to strengthen society?
For nearly two and a half centuries the American answer has been remarkably consistent. Religion remains entirely free. Government remains constitutionally limited. The church influences society through preaching, education, charity, and moral persuasion, while government protects that freedom without becoming religion's institutional partner.

The purpose of this booklet has never been to argue that religion should retreat from public life. Christianity should continue to influence society through faithful preaching, compassionate ministry, education, charity, and moral leadership.

The question has always been one of jurisdiction.

Who governs the conscience?

Christ answered that question before Pilate.
America's founders answered it in the Constitution.
History answered it through centuries of persecution.

The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission now asks America to reconsider it.

Every generation must decide whether civil government will remain within the limits God assigned it, or whether it will gradually assume authority over matters that belong to God alone.

The conscience belongs to God. Caesar has no rightful claim upon it.

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Chapter 7 -The Final Test of Liberty of Conscience

Throughout this study we have examined religious liberty from three perspectives. We began with Scripture, where Christ distinguished His kingdom from the kingdoms of this world and declared that His servants do not advance His cause through civil force. We then examined the constitutional principles embraced by America's founders, who recognized that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience. Finally, we considered the recommendations of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission and asked whether they preserve that historic understanding or move in a different direction.

These questions are important not merely because they concern constitutional history. According to Bible prophecy, they become central in the closing conflict between Christ and Satan.

From Genesis to Revelation, the great controversy has never centered merely upon politics, economics, or civil government. At its heart lies the question of worship. Who is worthy of worship? Who possesses authority over the conscience? Who determines religious truth? These questions reach their climax in Revelation 13, where worship is enforced by civil authority under the threat of economic sanctions and ultimately death. The final conflict is therefore not fundamentally political. It is a conflict over jurisdiction. Who has authority over worship? God or the state?

Jesus answered that question before Pilate:
"My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight." (John 18:36)

Throughout this booklet we have returned repeatedly to these words because they establish the biblical boundary between Christ's kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. Civil government bears the sword to preserve public order. Christ governs the conscience through truth, love, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Genuine worship cannot be compelled because it must arise from a willing heart.

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The book of Daniel illustrates this same principle. In Daniel 3, Nebuchadnezzar erected a golden image and commanded every nation to worship it under penalty of death. In Daniel 6, another decree prohibited prayer to anyone except the king. In both instances, the issue was not whether civil government existed. God Himself had ordained civil government. The issue was whether civil rulers possessed authority over worship. The faithful obeyed the king in every lawful matter, but when civil authority claimed jurisdiction over the conscience, they obeyed God rather than men.

Revelation presents the same issue on a worldwide scale. The beast receives worship. An image to the beast is formed. The second beast causes the inhabitants of the earth to worship the first beast. The prophecy is not merely predicting persecution. It is predicting the reappearance of the same governing principle that has appeared throughout history: civil authority assuming jurisdiction over worship.

An image reflects the character of the original. The medieval system united ecclesiastical authority with civil power to enforce religious conformity. Revelation predicts not merely another persecution, but the reappearance of that governing principle. Whenever civil government assumes authority over worship, the image begins to form because the same relationship between church and state has returned.

America's Providential Beginning

Ellen White understood that the rise of the United States occupied a unique place in prophecy. Before describing America's future role in Revelation 13, she first explained why the nation became such a powerful defender of liberty of conscience.

She wrote:

"Among the Christian exiles who first fled to America and sought an asylum from royal oppression and priestly intolerance were many who

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determined **to establish a government upon the broad foundation of civil and religious liberty**.... Freedom of religious faith was also granted, every man being permitted to worship God according to the dictates of **his conscience**.... **Republicanism and Protestantism became the fundamental principles of the nation**. These principles are the secret of its power and prosperity." *(The Great Controversy, p. 441.)*

This statement deserves careful attention. Ellen White identifies two principles that distinguished America from the nations of Europe.

Republicanism recognized that civil authority derives its just powers from the consent of the governed rather than from ecclesiastical control or hereditary monarchy.

Protestantism, in its historic sense, represented more than a collection of denominations. It embodied the great protest against the union of church and state that had dominated much of medieval Europe through the Papal church. It affirmed the supremacy of Scripture, the direct accountability of every individual to God, and the liberty of every person to worship according to the dictates of conscience without civil coercion.

Together these principles established constitutional restraints that protected liberty of conscience unlike any nation before it.

Liberty Must Be Extended to Everyone

Yet Ellen White was equally careful not to idealize America's beginnings. Although many of the early colonists came seeking freedom from religious persecution, they did not always extend that same freedom to others.

She observed:

"Yet honest and God-fearing as they were, the Pilgrims did not yet comprehend the great principle of religious toleration. The freedom which they sacrificed so much to secure for themselves, they were not equally ready to grant to others." *(The Great Controversy, p. 292.)*

DOJ-RLC Comment-012445

She then describes what happened when church and civil authority became united in the Massachusetts Bay Colony:

"The regulation was adopted by the colonists, that only church-members should have a voice in the civil government.... A kind of State church was formed... the magistrates being authorized to suppress heresy. Thus the secular power was in the hands of the church. It was not long before these measures led to the inevitable result—persecution." *(The Great Controversy, p. 293.)*

The lesson is unmistakable. Even sincere and devoted Christians can repeat the mistakes of history whenever civil government assumes authority over religion. The problem was never Christianity itself. The problem was the union of ecclesiastical authority with the coercive power of the state.

The Prophetic Warning
Having explained both America's strengths and its early failures, Ellen White then looked forward to the final crisis.

She summarized the biblical principle in these words:
"To protect liberty of conscience is the duty of the state, and this is the limit of its authority in matters of religion." *(The Great Controversy, p. 201.)*

This statement perfectly harmonizes with the teachings of Christ, the apostles, and the principles embraced by America's founders. Civil government is ordained by God, but its authority has divinely established limits. It exists to preserve justice and civil order, not to govern worship or the conscience.

Because of this principle, Ellen White repeatedly warned against every movement that would weaken the constitutional restraints protecting liberty of conscience. Writing in 1900, she declared:

"An amendment to the Constitution restricting liberty of conscience, has long been urged upon the legislators of the nation; and the question of

DOJ-RLC Comment-012446

enforcing Sunday observance has become one of national importance. Are we ready for the issue involved in the Sunday movement?" *(Signs of the Times, November 28, 1900.)*

It is significant that she begins, not with Sunday, but with **"an amendment to the Constitution restricting liberty of conscience."** The prophetic issue is constitutional before it is ceremonial. Sunday legislation becomes significant because it represents civil government exercising authority over worship.

Her warning becomes even more direct in *The Great Controversy*:

"Let the restraints now imposed by secular governments be removed and Rome be reinstated in her former power, and there would speedily be a revival of her tyranny and persecution." *(The Great Controversy, p. 564.)*

Throughout this booklet we have identified those restraints. They are the constitutional principles that deny civil government jurisdiction over the conscience and protect every individual's right to worship according to the dictates of conscience. Remove those restraints, and history demonstrates what follows. The issue is not merely one religious observance or another. The issue is whether civil government possesses authority to command worship.

Conclusion
This brings us back to the question that has guided this entire study.

Who possesses jurisdiction over the conscience?

Scripture answers: God.
Christ answered: God.

America's founders sought to preserve that principle by carefully limiting the jurisdiction of civil government.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012447

Ellen White warned that the final conflict would arise when those constitutional restraints began to disappear.

As America commemorates 250 years of constitutional government, the preservation of liberty of conscience deserves more than patriotic celebration. It deserves careful vigilance. Liberty has rarely been lost all at once. More often it has been redefined—gradually, respectfully, and with the best of intentions. The issue has never been whether religion should influence society. The issue has always been whether civil government should exercise authority over worship.

That question stood before Nebuchadnezzar.
It stood before Darius.
It stood before Pilate.
It confronted the Pilgrims as they struggled to extend the liberty they themselves had sought.

According to Revelation, it will soon stand before the entire world once again.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012448

Appendix A

Selected Statements from the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
The purpose of this appendix is to provide several representative statements from the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission and its members that are discussed throughout this booklet. They are presented so readers may examine the Commission's own language alongside the constitutional and biblical principles discussed in the preceding chapters.

1. Dan Patrick -Chairman, Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
On "Separation of Church and State"
"...the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution... From this day forward, that phrase should have no power over people of all faiths ever again in America."

2. Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Report
From a Wall to a Bridge
"The concept of a 'wall of separation between church and state' can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another... Perhaps a better analogy is that religious liberty acts as a bridge between church and state."

3. Recommendations of the Commission
Among the recommendations discussed in this booklet are:

- Expanded partnerships between government and faith-based organizations.
- Increased opportunities for religious organizations to participate in government funding.
- Repeal of the Johnson Amendment.
- Additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life.
- Creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty.

These recommendations are presented by the Commission as ways to strengthen religious liberty.

4. Bishop Robert Barron - Member, Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
On Religion in Public Life
"If you marginalized and privatized religion, democracy is in danger... Values is up to me. My gender, it's up to me. The whole structure of my life, it's my choice. That's deadly to our democracy."

Questions for the Reader
After reading the report and the statements above, consider the following questions:

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- Does the Commission define religious liberty in the same way America's founders defined it?
- Does replacing a "wall" with a "bridge" preserve the constitutional limits placed upon civil government, or does it encourage a different relationship between government and religion?
- Can government become an institutional partner with religion while remaining outside the jurisdiction of the conscience?
- How should Christians encourage religion's influence upon society while preserving the constitutional principle that civil government possesses no authority over worship?

These are the questions this booklet has sought to examine.

Appendix B
The Great Controversy over Liberty of Conscience- A Biblical and Historical Timeline
c. 605 B.C. — Daniel 3: Worship by Civil Decree
King Nebuchadnezzar erects a golden image and commands all nations to worship it under penalty of death. The issue is not civil government itself, but civil government exercising authority over worship.
c. 539 B.C. — Daniel 6: Prayer Forbidden
King Darius signs a decree prohibiting prayer to anyone except the king for thirty days. Daniel obeys the king in all lawful matters but refuses to surrender his conscience to civil authority.
A.D. 31 — Christ Before Pilate
Jesus declares: *"My kingdom is not of this world... if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight."*
Christ distinguishes His kingdom from the kingdoms of this world and establishes the biblical boundary between civil authority and the conscience.
A.D. 31 — "Render Unto Caesar"
Jesus teaches that Caesar has legitimate authority—but only within the sphere God has assigned him.
A.D. 31–33 — The Apostles Before the Sanhedrin
Peter declares: *"We ought to obey God rather than men."*
The apostles recognize the legitimacy of civil authority while affirming that God's authority over the conscience is supreme

The Development of American Religious Liberty
1636 — Roger Williams Calls for a "hedge or wall of separation" protecting the church from civil power.
1773–1774 — Isaac Backus Distinguishes the two governments ordained by God that "ought never to be confounded together."
1780s — John Leland Argues that liberty of conscience is far more than mere toleration because government possesses no rightful authority over religion.
1785 — James Madison Publishes his *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, defending liberty of conscience and arguing that religion is exempt from

DOJ-RLC Comment-012450

the authority of civil society.
1791 — The First Amendment Congress is forbidden from establishing religion while protecting its free exercise.
1790 — George Washington Promises that the United States gives "to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."
1802 — Thomas Jefferson Describes the First Amendment as building "a wall of separation between Church & State."

The Historical Debate
1832 — Gregory XVI *Mirari Vos* Rejects unrestricted liberty of conscience.
1864 — Pius IX *Quanta Cura* Describes liberty of conscience as "a most pestilential error."
1888 — Leo XIII *Libertas* Argues that unrestricted liberty of worship is not true liberty.
1965 — Vatican II *Dignitatis Humanae* Affirms immunity from coercion in religious matters while presenting this as a development of Catholic teaching. Yet, claiming not to have changed.

The Prophetic Perspective
1900 — Ellen White
Warns of efforts to amend the Constitution restricting liberty of conscience and identifies this as the beginning of the Sunday movement.

The Great Controversy
States: "To protect liberty of conscience is the duty of the state, and this is the limit of its authority in matters of religion."

She also warns: "Let the restraints now imposed by secular governments be removed... there would speedily be a revival of her tyranny and persecution."

Today -2026 — Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
The Commission recommends a "bridge" rather than a "wall" between church and state and calls for expanded institutional cooperation between government and religion, raising the constitutional questions examined throughout this booklet.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012451

TWO VISIONS.
ONE FUTURE.
THE CHOICE IS BEFORE US.
We The People
CHURCH ABOVE STATE
COMPULSION.
PERSECUTION.
LOST CONSCIENCE.
GOD ABOVE ALL CONSCIENCE BEFORE GOD LIBERTY
FREEDOM.
CONSCIENCE.
LIMITED GOVERNMENT.
WHICH FOUNDATION WILL AMERICA CHOOSE?
A BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL STUDY OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, CHURCH AND STATE, AND THE CONFLICT OF THE AGES.
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PROCLAIMING TRUTH. PREPARING A PEOPLE.
THE END IS NEAR.

From: Steve [redacted] PII [redacted] PII [redacted]>
To: "[redacted] PII [redacted]" <[redacted] PII [redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Steve
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:15:02 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing from Holiday Island, Arkansas, as a citizen who cares about getting this right, because both religion clauses of the First Amendment stand or fall together. I don't write as part of any campaign; I write because I think the Commission's work will shape whether my grandchildren inherit a country where conscience is genuinely free.

Start with a simple test of what a right actually is. If religious liberty exists only because a majority currently favors it, then a future majority can vote it away, and it was never a right at all — only a permission, revocable at the polls. The American theory has always been the opposite: rights are inherent, given by the Creator, and the Constitution places them beyond the reach of election returns. That is exactly why popular government is instituted to protect the minority, not the majority — a majority can already take care of itself at the ballot box. When Senator Blair told Jones that most Americans wanted Sunday legislation, Jones's answer still holds: the people, however numerous, have no right to invade another person's relationship to God. Even Congress once agreed, ruling that the Constitution regards the conscience of a solitary dissenter as sacred as that of an entire community. "Most Americans want it" cannot justify a religious policy, because religion was never a matter submitted to the vote.

The deeper argument here isn't secular at all — it's Christian. Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and unto God what is God's divides all human duty into two jurisdictions, and civil government was given only one of them. As Jones told a Senate committee in 1888, civil government is civil, and has nothing to do with legislating religious observance; there is a limit to lawmaking power, and Christ himself drew it. The test that follows is simple and needs no religious inquiry at all: government may ask only whether an action is civil or uncivil, never whether it is religious or irreligious. Morality belongs to God; civility belongs to the state. Every proposal that puts government behind a religious text, display, or lesson crosses that line — not because it is too religious for a secular state, but because it is forbidden by the very faith it claims to serve.

And this isn't only philosophy or theology — it's precedent, set by Congress itself. When Sabbatarian petitioners pushed for Sunday mail restrictions, Congressional committee reports adopted in 1829 and 1830, while men who had lived through the founding still sat in the chamber, declared plainly that ours is a civil government, not a religious one, and that it is not its province to determine what religion is true or false. Those reports warned that if government defines one point of religious duty, it claims the power to define them all, down to the ceremonies of worship itself. They even noted that coercion cannot produce genuine faith — human power may extort outward compliance, but only conviction commands the heart. As the Senate report put it, what other nations call toleration, we call rights. A commission proposing government-endorsed religious duties in our own time is not just testing a modern court ruling; it is asking to overturn what Congress itself declared appropriate to its own limits two centuries ago.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Steve
Holiday Island, AR

From: consuelo orduno <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:15:41 e0400
Importance: Normal

Consuelo Orduno
To The Members of The White House Liberty

I respectfully submit this comment to urge the Commission to defend the Constitution and historic principles of religious liberty and the separation of church and state! I oppose any and all recommendations to the Department of Justice or another government agency that would weaken these constitutional safeguards or encourage greater unity between religious institutions and civil government.

True religious liberty doesn't require the government to promote any religion!
It requires government to protect every person's right to worship according to their conscience-or not to worship at all-without interference, discrimination or coercion!

Our own American history shows why this protection is vitally important! During the colonial period religious minorities such as the Jews, Quakers , Baptist, etc… suffered fines, imprisonment and discrimination because established churches enjoyed the support of the state.
Theses abuses helped lead to the adoption of the First Amendment!

History repeatedly shows the danger of giving civil authority power over conscience.
Whether through religious persecution, state-backed religious extremism, or atheistic governments that suppress faith, the result is always the same: individual liberty is lost!
Government should protect individual rights, public order and equal treatment under the law! Religious institutions should advance their beliefs through teaching, persuasion and voluntary faith- not through civil power of coercion! Genuine religion does not need the state to compel belief or observance!
I respectfully urge the Commission to reject any proposal that weakens the constitutional separation of church and state. Every church should remain free to proclaim its religious beliefs and every citizen should remain free to accept or reject those beliefs without government pressure of any sort!

The lessons of history are clear. When civil and religious powers unite, intolerance and injustice follow!
Please defend the First Amendment and preserve the religious freedom of every American!

Respectfully submitted,

Consuelo Orduno

Sent from my iPhone

From: Carey Carscallen <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Carey Carscallen
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:16:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state. We must refrain from using government money to fund religious activities and we must not repeal the Johnson Amendment. When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the overbearing interest of politics comes with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God, which is bad for the church and the country alike. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here in the United States. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both free.

Sincerely,

Carey Carscallen
Berrien Springs, Michigan

From: Marcia Breitenbach <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] religious liberty comment
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:16:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

Though the phrase church and state separation isn't explicitly in the Constitution it is certainly implied. I want to urge this commission to review history and you will find that the union of church and state always led to the persecution of people who didn't fit in with the majority. God gave us choice and we should respect the Creator's example. Marcia Breitenbach, Tucson, AZ

From: "Joanna S.S" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - [Protest against the June 26, 2026 draft report of the RLC] - [Joanna S] .
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:17:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 13, 2026

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph 1:2)

Please accept this formal written protest regarding the Commission's recently published draft report. As an American citizen committed to true religious freedom, I urge the Commission to withdraw its current recommendations.

The proposed policies overstep the boundary between civil governance and divine authority.

My objection is grounded in the foundational principle written in Luke 20:25: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's. (KJV)

This scriptural mandate establishes clear boundaries that the Commission's draft report fails to respect:

• Limits on Civil Authority: Earthly governments possess legitimate authority over civic matters like taxation, protection of persons and property of men, public safety and order. They do not hold authority over the human conscience or spiritual matters.

• The Sacred Domain: The human soul bears the image of God, not the stamp of the state. Government overreaches when it attempts to codify, prefer, or enforce specific religious doctrines that are backed by a religious majority.

• Protection of Faith in Neutrality: True religious liberty requires the state to remain neutral. It must not use public funds or state power to champion any singular religious worldview or agenda. To protect liberty of conscience is the duty of the State, and this is the limit of its authority in matters of religion.

The draft report's efforts to blend government authority with religious practice compromise both the integrity of the state and the religious freedom that is guaranteed in our constitution.

I request that the Commission respect this sacred boundary by rescinding the report and reaffirming the principle of absolute separation of church and state that our country's founders established in our constitution.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these comments.

Respectfully submitted,
Joanna S

From: Fyrn S Forbes-Canning <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT Separation of Church and State Fyrn S Forbes-Canning
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:18:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I was profoundly saddened to learn that the Commission desires to replace the wall separating church and state with a "**bridge**." With all due respect, I believe this approach is backwards, and as a person of faith, I find the idea appalling.

The separation of church and state was established to maintain freedom of reliaion and keep the church free; it was not built by secularists to suppress religion. Introducing this "bridge" will not strengthen the church. Instead, it opens the door for government funding and political favors, leading churches to compete for grants and answer to politicians rather than to God. History clearly demonstrates that the merging of church and state is detrimental to both.

Please do not build that bridge. Keep the wall, as it protects the church far more than it constrains it.

Sincerely,

Fvrn S Forbes-Canning
Pikeville, Tennessee

From: Carin <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Carin J. Lynch
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:18:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen of Whiteside, Tennessee, who cares deeply about religious liberty and about keeping it intact for everyone, not just for whichever faith holds the majority this decade. I ask you to consider four arguments that I believe should weigh heavily on your recommendations.

First, any law touching religion, even one meant to favor it, ultimately destroys free exercise. Barnes Jones put this plainly before a Senate committee: it is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion. Every religious law must define the religion it protects, and every definition excludes someone while placing everyone else under permission rather than freedom. Jones went further and said that no man can safely consent to legislation favoring his own faith, because in doing so he resigns his right to change his mind if he becomes convinced some other view is nearer the truth. That is the quiet radicalism worth remembering: religious liberty includes the liberty to be persuaded. A law locking in today's convictions binds tomorrow's conscience, and the machinery built to favor one faith will eventually be handed to those who do not share it.

Second, the founders' separation of religion from government was not an oversight or a later invention, but deliberate design, born of respect for religion itself. Madison told the Virginia ratifying convention there is not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion, and that its least interference would be a most flagrant usurpation. The Memorial and Remonstrance explains the method behind this vigilance: the freemen of America did not wait till usurped power had strengthened itself by exercise, and entangled the question in precedents; they saw all the consequences in the principle, and avoided the consequences by denying the principle. It was churches themselves, Baptists, Presbyterians, Quakers, who had felt establishment from underneath, who pushed hardest for this separation. Any commission that claims the founders for state-sponsored religion must reckon with Madison's own words.

Third, this question was already settled by Congress itself, one generation after the founding, when men who had lived through it still sat in the chambers. The 1830 House report declared that government is a civil and not a religious institution, and that a representative is chosen to guard the rights of man, not to restrict the rights of conscience. That same report warned that once a legislature defines one point of religious duty, it may with equal propriety define every part of divine revelation. The Senate report distilled the American difference in nine words: what other nations call religious toleration, we call religious rights. A commission proposing to revisit this ground is not overturning a modern court ruling but an official act of the founding generation's own Congress.

Fourth, coercion cannot produce faith, only its counterfeit. Forcing observance, Jones wrote, will not make Christians of men; it may make hypocrites, but Christians none. Madison's own survey of fifteen centuries of established Christianity found the fruits to be pride and indolence in the clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, superstition, bigotry, and persecution. Grant said it best: leave religion to the family altar, the church, and the private school, and keep the state and church forever separate. State favor does not strengthen faith; it hollows it out.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Carin J. Lynch
Whiteside, TN

Sent from my Galaxy

From: Carin [redacted]
To: "RLC (OASG)" [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Carin J. Lynch
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:18:32 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a resident of Whiteside, Tennessee, and as someone who cares deeply that religion in this country remain free, which means remaining free of government's hand, whether that hand is closed in a fist or open in a supposed blessing. I ask you to consider four points together, because they are really one argument.

First, any law touching religion, even one written to favor religion, destroys the very free exercise it claims to protect. As Jones testified before a Senate committee, it is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion. The reason is structural: such a law must define the religion it favors, and once religion is defined by statute, even the favored believer holds his faith by permission rather than by right. Jones made the point sharpest when he turned it on the winners of religious legislation: no man can ever sanction legislation in favor of the religion in which he believes without robbing himself of the free exercise of that religion, because he thereby resigns his right to profess some other form of faith should he come to see it as nearer the truth. A creed locked into law is a conscience locked against its own future growth.

Second, the founders' separation of religion and government was not an oversight later invented by courts; it was deliberate design, urged by the churches of the founding era themselves. Madison told the Virginia ratifying convention there is not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion, and that its least interference would be a most flagrant usurpation. His Memorial and Remonstrance explains why the founders resisted even small religious measures: they did not wait till usurped power had strengthened itself by exercise and entangled the question in precedents, but saw all the consequences in the principle and avoided them by denying the principle. A commission claiming the founders for state-sponsored religion must answer Madison in Madison's own words.

Third, this is not only the founders' judgment but the government's own settled precedent. Congress itself ruled on this question in 1829 and 1830, when men who had lived through the founding still sat in its chambers. The Senate report declared it is not in the legitimate province of the legislature to determine what religion is true or what false, for our government is a civil and not a religious institution. The House report warned that once government defines one point of religious duty, it may with equal propriety proceed to define every part of divine revelation. That report also gave us the phrase that names our whole system: what other nations call religious toleration, we call religious rights.

Fourth, coercion cannot produce faith; it only produces hypocrisy, while state favor corrupts the church it props up. As Jones put it, any attempt to enforce religious observances only enforces hypocrisy and multiplies sin, because love for God is essential to every act of religious duty. Madison's own survey of fifteen centuries of religious establishment found, in his words, pride and indolence in the clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, and in both superstition, bigotry, and persecution. Grant's counsel still stands: leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the Church, and the private school, supported entirely by private contribution, and keep the State and Church forever separate.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,

Carin J. Lynch
Whiteside, TN

Sent from my Galaxy

From: Noreen Strout <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:20:05 -0400
Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone
To whom it may concern:

I am a sovereign citizen who was stripped of every earthly possession by the judiciary

Religious intolerance has been vogue in the judiciary for many years. Whenever "Christian" is accused it results in discrimination discrimination discrimination. Making an official combination of church and state, contrary to the clear wording of the First Amendment, will only exacerbate the problems in society not fix them.

The centralizing of wealth and power; the vast combinations for the enriching of the few at the expense of the many; the combinations of the poorer classes for the defense of their interests and claims; the spirit of unrest, of riot and bloodshed; the world-wide dissemination of the same teachings that led to the French Revolution—all are tending to involve the whole world in a struggle similar to that which convulsed France.

To anyone with eyes it is clear that one version of "Christianity" is rising that will exclude all others. Deception is practiced with impunity by those in government upon the credulous masses as Rome seeks to remain her lost world supremacy. Even those who claim to be of the Catholic faith, who have grown up in a nation that was established as a Protestant Republic have no idea the real purposes of Rome. But you soon will know and feel what her real purposes are only when it is too late to escape the snare.
I object to the wresting to the Constitution of the United States by the Religious Liberty Commission claiming that the precise words "separation of church and state" are not contained within when the clear principle is framed within and has been upheld for many years.
I urge you to reject the notion of combining church and state which will result in civil powers forcing one version of religion upon all. You must protect the individual right of conviction of conscience in religious matters for every individual although it may differ from you own just as you would want that right to freely choose what you believe in matters of religion.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/ Noreen-Evelyn Strout

From: Steve S <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Church and State Separation
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:22:49 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Department of Justice and the President's Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a committed, Bible-believing Christian who deeply values religious liberty. It is because of my faith—not in spite of it—that I believe the separation of church and state remains one of the greatest protections for Christianity and for every person's freedom of conscience.

Too often, the separation of church and state is portrayed as hostility toward religion. I see it differently. It protects the church from government interference just as much as it protects government from becoming entangled in religious matters. Whenever the church looks to the state to accomplish its mission, both institutions are diminished. The church risks exchanging its spiritual influence for political power, while the government risks favoring one faith over another.

My faith teaches me that conscience belongs to God alone. Genuine faith cannot be created through legislation or sustained by political influence. Jesus Himself distinguished between the responsibilities of Caesar and the responsibilities owed to God, and I believe that distinction is as important today as it was then. Government has an important role in maintaining order and protecting our constitutional rights, but it should never become the vehicle through which one religious group imposes its convictions on everyone else.

For that reason, I respectfully urge the Commission not to view the separation of church and state as a constitutional mistake. The two religion clauses of the First Amendment—the protection of the free exercise of religion and the prohibition against government establishment of religion—work together. Religious liberty is strongest when government neither suppresses religion nor promotes or privileges one faith above another.

I would also encourage great caution regarding any effort to weaken the Johnson Amendment. Churches should remain places where biblical truth is proclaimed and people are pointed to Christ—not where partisan political campaigns are advanced. The church's influence is most powerful when it is rooted in conviction rather than political alignment.

History repeatedly demonstrates the wisdom of this principle. Religious persecution in America has often come not from secular government alone, but from religious majorities using civil authority against those who believed differently. Baptists, Quakers, Catholics, Jews, and many others have experienced discrimination when government aligned itself with one religious tradition. Our constitutional framework wisely sought to prevent those abuses, and I hope it continues to do so.

As a Christian, I do not fear the separation of church and state. I believe it strengthens both. It preserves the integrity of the church, protects the God-given freedom of conscience, and safeguards the religious liberty of every American—whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, atheist, or of any other faith.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to protecting the constitutional freedoms that have long distinguished our nation.

Respectfully,

Steven Saint-George

From: Lynda Youmans <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment- religious liberty commission-Lynda Youmans
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:23:17 -0400
Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedoms comments, and I disagree with the commissions effort to weaken and get rid of the separation of church and state. I also disagree with the funding of religious nonprofit activities, funding religious education, and religious clubs on public campuses.

The Johnson Amendment restricts churches political activities, and I request that the Johnson's amendment be fully enforced. As a Christian, I have had the freedom of choosing which church I want to go to and what day I can go to church. Without the separation of state and church this freedom would not be possible.

Sent from my iPhone

From: trullurn <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT Keep Church and State Separate [TLi]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:24:21 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Having been born and raised in this land of the free, and also having lived in a communist country, has enabled me to especially value our forefathers' foresight via experience in keeping church and state separate.

During my several years in the communist country, the police warned me that I would be expulsed because of my regular meetings with friends in my own apartment for using Bible stories to learn english. A church was severely warned for inviting me to speak about health. Today, children are not allowed to enter churches in this country. This is why I choose to live in America.

Hence, I am gravely concerned over the Commission's report in stating "Where We Are Now: Building Bridges Between Church and State" p44.

James Madison enunciated clearly in his response to the Virginia Ratifying Convention on June 12, 1788: "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."
(Accessed July 13, 2026, from
https://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/amendI_religions49.html)

Please correct the Report's attempt to portray the separation of church and state as a modern notion that arrived in the 1900s (p41 "Building Walls of Separation Between Church and State").

James Madison also recognized that history repeats when a bridge is in existence between church and state. In his eleventh reason for battling against state-subsidized religion: " 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."
(Accessed July 13, 2026, from "Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments, [CA. 20 Jun] 1785"
https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-08-02-0163)

Madison would heartily object with me, to the Report's repeated attempts to federally fund religious education (p64, 74, 79).

The need to keep church and state separate would also see the value of the Johnson Amendment, to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of all charitable organizations. The Report attempts to repeal this Amendment on p121. Hence, I respectfully request that the Johnson Amendment remain fully enforced.

No doubt, America is facing moral degeneration. However, the government has no authority to legislate moral obligation.

Why do I choose to be a citizen of America? Because it is a country founded on separation of church and state. I choose not to live in a communist country, because I want my son to be able to grow up in a society where his moral obligation is not dictated by the state.

For the sake of our sons and daughters, please do not break down the wall of separation that has made this country truly great.

Sincerely,
Trudie Li, MSN
Chattanooga, TN

From: Janice Ebel <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] public comment on separation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:24:42 -0400
Importance: Normal

DEAR MEMBERS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION,

I object to the following:
1, The government funding of religious non-profit activities
2, the government funding of education and of religious clubs on public campuses.
3, the government repealing the Johnson Amendment.

In addition, I request that the Johnson amendment be fully enforced.
Also, I object to the special treatment being given to the Jewish people and the state of Israel.

Thank you for this opportunity to express my thoughts.

Janice Ebel,
Rogue River, Oregon

From: Bill Hamilton <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] To Whom It May Concern
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:27:19 -0400
Importance: Normal

I agree with the Pillar of Freedom's concern regarding the weakening and dismantling of the separation of church and state. Please maintain this wall strong with continued separation of church and state.

Sincerely,
Wiiilam Hamilton

From: é"[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Wall of Separation ADVOCATE
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:28:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear leaders of this country who make laws as the voices ring out among the countrymen, please do not re-think the wall of separation between church and state. The voices in our day have long forgotten the blood shed of the dark ages and are in no way well informed to re-think this issue. We enjoy the freedom of religious sway over this country because we, the informed people, still believe that a Muslim gets to practice the dictates of his conscience and be a Muslim, likewise the Atheist, likewise the Wiccan, likewise the Protestant, likewise the Catholic, etc etc. Give to Ceasar unto Ceasar...but give to God what is His. We have an unrevokable God-given right to freely exercise our will and that cancels out a legislative body's right to trample on these freedoms of conscience. Legislative bodies deal in civil matters, matters of man to man. Civil laws are made and abide by, and Theological laws especially touching the worship of a Sovereign are HANDS OFF to civil authority. We will not accept laws enforcing the closure of businesses for the greater good, WHICH WILL SURELY HAPPEN IF church is consulted in civil matters. Church stays on the side that Church is to stay on, and Civil stays on its side.

Leanne Lengerich
versailles indiana

From: Dennis Wicklund <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT [Religious Liberty Commission Report] [Dennis Wicklund]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:28:16 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: From-Separation-to-Partnership-Addressing-the-Religious-Liberty-Commission.pdf

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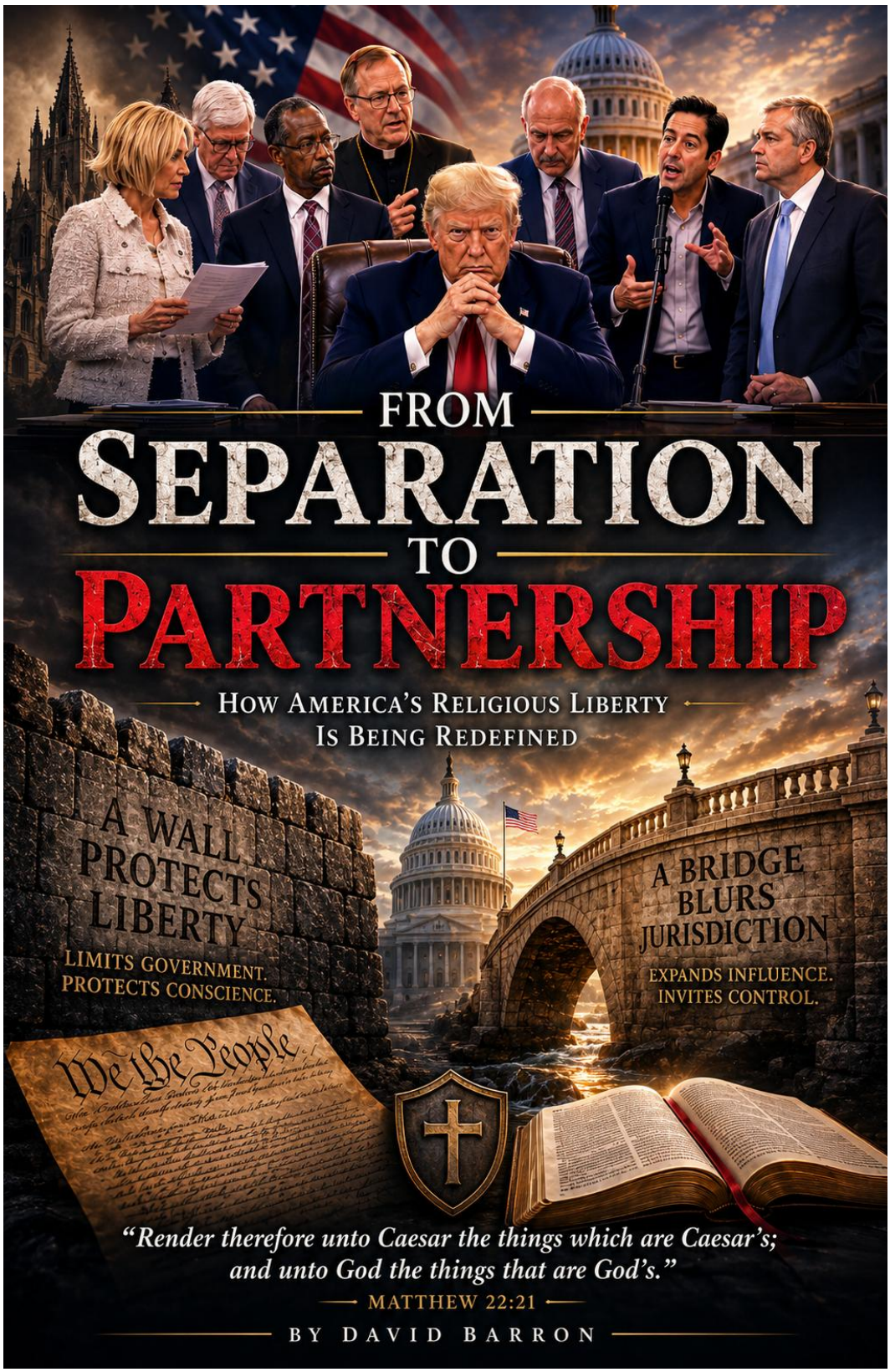
Please see attached pamphlet.

In my own words, I respect the rule of law under the power of the state. I respect the efforts of the various religious bodies which grace our nation in preservation of the right of the people to peaceably assemble


FROM
SEPARATION
TO
PARTNERSHIP
How America's Religious Liberty
Is Being Redefined
A WALL PROTECTS LIBERTY
LIMITS GOVERNMENT.
PROTECTS CONSCIENCE.
A BRIDGE BLURS JURISDICTION
EXPANDS INFLUENCE.
INVITES CONTROL.
We the People
"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's;
and unto God the things that are God's."
MATTHEW 22:21
BY DAVID BARRON

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DOJ-RLC Comment-012473

How the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Redefines Religious Liberty

The Question Before America- Introduction

For more than two centuries, the United States has understood religious liberty to rest upon a simple but profound principle. Thomas Jefferson expressed it in his famous letter to the Danbury Baptist Association:

*"Believing with you that religion is a matter which **lies solely between Man & his God**, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach **actions only, & NOT OPINIONS**."*

President Donald Trump receives the report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission at the White House. This booklet examines the Commission's recommendations in eradicating the term "separation of church and state".

Those words captured the historic American understanding of liberty of conscience. Civil government was ordained by God, but its authority was deliberately limited. It was entrusted with the responsibility of preserving justice, protecting life, and maintaining civil order. It was **not** entrusted with authority over faith, worship, or the conscience.

The issue has never been whether government is ordained by God. Scripture plainly teaches that it is. The issue has always been where God said government must stop.

The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission affirms the importance of religion and rightly recognizes the vital role faith has played in the history of the United States. Yet its recommendations represent a significant shift in emphasis. Rather than defining religious liberty primarily by the constitutional limits placed upon civil government, the Commission encourages a closer institutional relationship between

DOJ-RLC Comment-012474

government and religion. It proposes replacing the familiar "wall of separation" with a "bridge" between church and state.

This booklet argues that the question before America is not whether religion should influence society. It should. Nor is the question whether government should protect the free exercise of religion. It must.

The question is whether civil government should move beyond protecting religious liberty and begin fostering an institutional partnership with religion.

That question reaches far beyond constitutional interpretation. It touches the biblical distinction Christ established between His kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. It shaped the convictions of America's founders, influenced the framing of the First Amendment, and ultimately points forward to the final conflict over worship described in Bible prophecy.

The pages that follow examine that question from three perspectives—Scripture, history, and the Constitution, to determine whether America's historic understanding of liberty of conscience is being preserved or redefined.

The conscience is not outside God's government—it is outside Caesar's.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012475

Chapter One - Liberty of Conscience Begins with God

Religious liberty is not first a constitutional principle. **It is a biblical principle.**

Long before legislatures enacted laws, before nations drafted constitutions, and before courts interpreted rights, God established the proper relationship between His kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. The distinction between civil authority and the conscience did not originate with Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Roger Williams, or any other statesman. It originated with Jesus Christ.

One of the clearest statements ever made concerning that distinction occurred while Jesus stood before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Accused of claiming to be a king, Jesus answered:

"My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence." (John 18:36)

This declaration establishes the foundation upon which every discussion of religious liberty must rest. Christ was not denying the legitimacy of civil government. He was defining its jurisdiction.

In fact, only a few verses later Jesus acknowledged that Pilate's authority had been given "from above" (John 19:11). Civil government has a legitimate place within God's order. Yet Christ made it unmistakably clear that His kingdom operates upon entirely different principles.

Earthly governments preserve civil order. They enact laws, punish crime, defend innocent life, and bear the sword against evildoers. Christ's kingdom advances in another way. It governs not by civil force, but by truth, conviction, love, and the work of the Holy Spirit upon the conscience. It never compels genuine faith by civil power.

Jesus explained the difference in a single sentence:

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"If My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight."

Earthly kingdoms ultimately rely upon force to maintain their authority. Christ's kingdom does not. Faith produced by coercion is not faith at all. A government may compel outward actions, but it cannot produce love for God. It may punish crime, but it cannot create holiness. It may command attendance, but it cannot command worship. Worship belongs to another kingdom.

Christ's words establish the biblical foundation of liberty of conscience. His kingdom does not spread by the sword of Caesar but by the power of truth working upon willing hearts.

The Two Jurisdictions
Jesus reinforced this principle when asked whether taxes should be paid to Caesar. Holding up a coin, He answered:

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21)

With these few words, Christ established two distinct jurisdictions. Caesar possesses legitimate authority. God possesses supreme authority. The question is not whether government has authority. Scripture plainly teaches that it does. The question is **what authority God has entrusted to it.**

Worship belongs to God. Faith belongs to God. Conscience belongs to God. No earthly ruler may rightfully claim what belongs exclusively to the Creator. Whenever civil government attempts to prescribe doctrine, direct worship, or compel religious belief, it reaches beyond the authority God has granted it. Those things belong to **God's jurisdiction** alone.

God Ordained Civil Government
The Bible does not teach anarchy. The Apostle Paul wrote:

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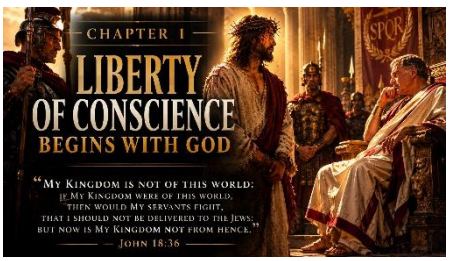
"For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." (Romans 13:1)

Civil government is God's servant for the preservation of society. Paul explains that rulers are appointed to reward those who do good and punish those who do evil. They "bear not the sword in vain," for they are "the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:4).

The sword is a civil instrument. It exists to restrain violence, protect innocent life, punish crime, and preserve public order. It was never given to enforce faith, determine doctrine, compel worship, or govern the conscience. God entrusted civil rulers with authority over civil matters—not over the conscience.



Romans 13 establishes both the authority and the limits of civil government. The magistrate bears the sword to preserve civil order and punish those who commit outward acts of evil. Yet nowhere does Scripture authorize civil government to compel worship, prescribe doctrine, or govern the heart. Those belong to God's jurisdiction alone. Civil rulers judge outward conduct; God alone judges the heart.

This distinction is essential. Not every sin falls within the jurisdiction of civil government. God condemns pride, covetousness, lust, hatred, envy, unbelief, idolatry, and every sinful thought of the heart. These are violations of God's moral law, yet they are not crimes that the civil magistrate is authorized to punish. No government can imprison a man for coveting his neighbor's house, fine him for pride, or sentence him for hatred in his heart. These sins are real, and God will judge them, but He has reserved that judgment to Himself.

Civil government is ordained to punish outward acts that violate the rights and safety of others—murder, theft, fraud, violence, and similar

DOJ-RLC Comment-012478

offenses. It was never commissioned to enforce the whole of God's moral law. If it were, the magistrate would be required to punish every violation of the Ten Commandments, including idolatry, unbelief, covetousness, and every sinful desire of the heart. Furthermore, with the punishment of death. We would all be guilty. (Romans 3:19) Scripture gives no such authority.

This is the distinction of jurisdiction. God ordained civil government to restrain outward acts that disturb the peace and safety of society. He never entrusted it with authority over worship, faith, repentance, doctrine, or the conscience. Those remain under His government alone.

The Limits of Civil Authority
The apostles themselves recognized this distinction. When commanded by the Jewish authorities to stop preaching Christ, Peter answered:

"We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

Peter did not deny the legitimacy of civil government, nor did he call for rebellion. He simply recognized that civil authority has limits. Whenever earthly rulers command what God forbids, or forbid what God commands, the jurisdiction of Caesar has ended and the jurisdiction of God remains supreme.

This is the very essence of liberty of conscience. No government possesses the authority to stand between God and the individual soul.

Faith Cannot Be Forced
Throughout Scripture, God appeals to mankind through persuasion rather than coercion.

Moses pleaded: *"I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life."* (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Joshua challenged Israel: *"Choose you this day whom ye will serve."* (Joshua 24:15)

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Paul wrote: *"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* (Romans 10:17)

Again he declared: *"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men."* (2 Corinthians 5:11)

The biblical pattern is unmistakable. God reveals truth. He invites. He warns. He pleads. He persuades. He never produces genuine worship through civil compulsion. If the Almighty Himself does not force the conscience, no earthly government has the right to do so.

Conclusion

The Scriptures establish two governments, each ordained by God for a distinct purpose. Civil government exists to preserve justice, punish wrongdoing, and protect society. It governs outward conduct. Christ's kingdom governs the heart, transforming the conscience through truth, love, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Confusing these two jurisdictions has produced some of the darkest chapters in human history. Whenever the church has sought the sword of the state, or the state has assumed authority over the conscience, liberty has suffered and religion has been corrupted. The chapters that follow will demonstrate how this biblical principle profoundly influenced the development of religious liberty in America, shaped the thinking of the nation's founders, and remains the defining issue in the ongoing debate over the proper relationship between church and state.

Biblical religious liberty is therefore far more than a constitutional principle. It is a divine principle established by Christ Himself.

Civil government is ordained by God, but it was never ordained to govern the conscience. The conscience belongs to God. Caesar has no rightful claim upon it.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012480

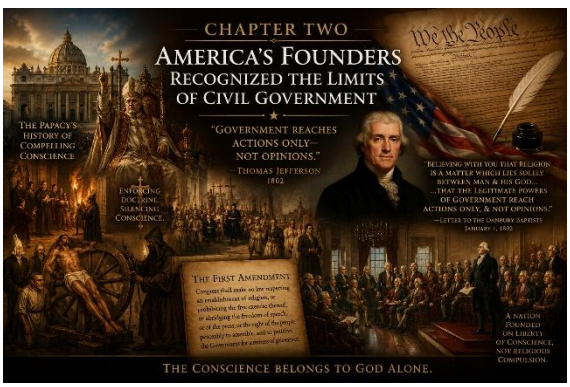
Chapter 2 - America's Founders Recognized the Limits of Civil Government

The principle of liberty of conscience did not begin with America's founders. As we saw in the previous chapter, it began with Jesus Christ Himself, who distinguished His kingdom from the kingdoms of this world and taught that what belongs to God must never be claimed by Caesar.

The founders of the United States did not invent this principle. Rather, they recognized it after centuries of painful experience and sought to preserve it in the constitutional system they established.

The American experiment in religious liberty was born from HISTORY For centuries, Europe witnessed repeated attempts to enforce religious conformity through civil power. Kings legislated doctrine. Magistrates enforced religious decrees. Churches relied upon the sword of the state to preserve orthodoxy, while governments relied upon religious institutions to strengthen political authority.

The result was not religious unity. It was persecution, imprisonment, confiscation of property, exile, torture, and death. America's founders knew this history well, and they were determined not to repeat it.



Roger Williams
Long before the American Revolution, Roger Williams recognized the danger of uniting church and state. A Puritan minister in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Williams believed that civil government had no authority over matters of faith and conscience. His convictions brought him into direct conflict with the colony's leaders, who believed the civil magistrate should help

DOJ-RLC Comment-012481

preserve religious uniformity. In 1635, Williams was banished from Massachusetts because of these convictions.

After establishing the colony of Rhode Island, he sought to build a society where liberty of conscience would be protected and civil government would exercise no authority over worship.

Describing the proper relationship between church and state, Williams wrote of: *"...the hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wilderness of the world."*

Williams' concern was not to protect the government from religion. It was to protect the church from the corrupting influence of civil power. He understood that once the civil magistrate entered the affairs of religion, both institutions would suffer. The church would gradually lose its spiritual independence, while the state would become entangled in matters that belonged to God alone.

Isaac Backus
A century later, Baptist minister Isaac Backus continued the same argument. Opposing the establishment of religion by civil government, he wrote:
"God has appointed two kinds of government in the world, which are in their nature and ought never to be confounded together."

Backus understood what Christ had taught centuries earlier. God ordained civil government to preserve justice and order, but He never gave it authority over faith or worship. To confuse those two governments was to violate the jurisdiction God Himself had established.

The language differs from Christ's teaching about rendering unto Caesar and unto God, but the principle is identical. There are two governments, two jurisdictions, and each must remain within the sphere God has assigned it.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012482

John Leland
John Leland, who greatly influenced James Madison regarding the first amendment carried this principle even further. A close friend of James Madison and an influential Baptist minister during the debates surrounding the Constitution, Leland insisted that liberty of conscience was more than mere toleration.

He wrote: *"The liberty I contend for is more than toleration. The very idea of toleration is despicable."*

Leland understood that toleration assumes government possesses authority over religion and merely chooses not to exercise it. Liberty of conscience rests upon an entirely different foundation. Government has no rightful jurisdiction over the conscience in the first place.

Leland also warned: *"The notion of a Christian commonwealth should be exploded forever."*

He was not arguing against Christianity influencing society. Rather, he rejected the idea that civil government should assume responsibility for enforcing Christianity.

Thomas Jefferson
Perhaps no founder expressed this principle more clearly than Thomas Jefferson. Writing to the Danbury Baptist Association on January 1, 1802, Jefferson declared:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions."

Jefferson did not merely defend religious tolerance. He identified the proper jurisdiction of civil government. Government may regulate actions affecting civil society, but it has no jurisdiction over faith, worship, or conscience. That authority belongs to God alone.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012483

Years earlier, Jefferson reflected upon Europe's history with these sobering words:
"Millions of innocent men, women, and children... have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch toward uniformity."

His conclusion was unmistakable. Civil force had failed to produce genuine faith. Instead, it had produced centuries of suffering.

James Madison
James Madison shared the same conviction. Often called the "Father of the Constitution," he became one of America's strongest defenders of liberty of conscience. Reflecting upon Europe's long history of religious persecution, Madison wrote:
"The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."

Madison was not speaking in the abstract. He was looking back upon centuries in which civil governments enforced religious conformity through the power of the state. Throughout much of the Middle Ages and beyond, church and civil authorities worked together to suppress what they regarded as heresy. The result was imprisonment, torture, confiscation of property, exile, and death.

Both Madison and Jefferson reached the same conclusion. Civil force cannot produce genuine faith. Instead of preserving religion, it corrupts both the church and the state. Whether expressed as "separation," "liberty of conscience," or the "free exercise" of religion, the principle remained the same. Civil government was never intended to govern religion. Its duty is to protect every person's liberty to worship God—or to decline worship—according to the dictates of conscience, without coercion from the state.

George Washington
America's first president expressed the practical result of these principles in his famous letter to the Hebrew Congregation at Newport

DOJ-RLC Comment-012484

in 1790:
"The Government of the United States... gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."

Washington did not speak merely of toleration. He envisioned a nation in which citizens of every faith could worship freely because government neither established religion nor persecuted those who differed.

The Constitution would not create religious liberty. Rather, it would protect the liberty of conscience that belongs to every person as a gift from God.

The First Amendment
These principles found expression in the First Amendment to the Constitution:
"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

Notice that the Amendment accomplishes two complementary purposes. First, it prevents the civil government from establishing religion. Second, it protects the free exercise of religion. These are not competing ideas, they are inseparable. Government refrains from exercising authority over religion precisely so that religion may remain free.

The freedom of the church depends upon the restraint of the state.

Is "Separation of Church and State" in the Constitution?
One objection frequently raised today is that the phrase "separation of church and state" never appears in the Constitution. That observation is correct. The exact phrase is not found in the Constitution. But the question is not whether Jefferson's particular wording appears. The question is whether the principle appears.

The First Amendment declares:

DOJ-RLC Comment-012485

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

Those words establish two complementary principles. Civil government may not establish religion, and it may not interfere with the free exercise of religion. Thomas Jefferson later described this constitutional arrangement as building **"a wall of separation between Church & State."** He was not inventing a new constitutional doctrine. He was describing the practical effect of the First Amendment.

Jefferson was not alone. James Madison defended the same principle. Roger Williams described a hedge or wall separating the church from the wilderness of the world. Isaac Backus spoke of two governments that "ought never to be confounded together." John Leland insisted that government possesses no rightful authority over the conscience. Though they expressed the idea differently, they defended the same constitutional principle: **civil government possesses no jurisdiction over religion because the conscience belongs to God.**

The issue, therefore, is not whether Jefferson's particular phrase appears in the Constitution. The issue is whether the Constitution limits civil government in matters of religion.

It plainly does.

Protecting Both Church and State

One of the greatest misunderstandings surrounding the phrase *"separation of church and state"* is the assumption that it was designed either to exclude religion from public life or merely to protect government from religious influence. The founders understood the issue differently. They believed that God had ordained both civil government and the church, but had entrusted each with a different jurisdiction.

History had repeatedly demonstrated the danger of confusing those jurisdictions. Whenever the church sought the power of the state, it gained political influence but lost its spiritual independence. Whenever

DOJ-RLC Comment-012486

the state assumed authority over religion, it became entangled in matters of faith and conscience that God had never entrusted to it. The result was not liberty, but persecution.

Roger Williams sought to preserve the church from the corrupting influence of civil power. Isaac Backus distinguished the two governments that God had ordained and insisted they must never be confounded. John Leland rejected mere toleration because he believed government possessed no rightful authority over the conscience. Thomas Jefferson limited the legitimate powers of government to "actions only, and not opinions." James Madison sought to spare America the religious bloodshed that had soaked the soil of Europe for centuries. George Washington envisioned a nation that would "give to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."

Though each expressed the principle in different language, they defended the same fundamental truth: civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience. By keeping church and state within their God-given spheres, they sought to preserve the independence of both institutions. The church would remain free to proclaim truth without relying upon civil power, and the government would remain free from assuming authority over worship, doctrine, or faith. In protecting liberty of conscience, they protected both the church and the state from exercising authority that belonged only to God.

Conclusion

America's founders did not establish liberty of conscience because they distrusted religion. They established it because they understood both Scripture and history. They recognized that Christ's kingdom advances through truth rather than force, and they deliberately limited the jurisdiction of civil government to preserve that principle.

For nearly 250 years, this understanding of liberty of conscience has distinguished the United States from the systems that preceded it. The question now before the nation is whether that historic understanding will be preserved, or fundamentally redefined.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012487

Chapter 3 -Religious Liberty Redefined

"The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." — Thomas Jefferson

A New Direction
The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission was established to examine the state of religious liberty in America and recommend ways to strengthen it. At first glance, many of its recommendations appear commendable. The report affirms the importance of religion, recognizes the indispensable role faith has played throughout American history, and calls for protecting the free exercise of religion. Every Christian should welcome sincere efforts to preserve the freedom to worship God according to the dictates of conscience.

The question before us, however, is not whether religious liberty should be protected. The question is **how the Commission defines religious liberty.** Throughout history, liberty has seldom disappeared by being openly abolished. More often it has been redefined until the original principle is scarcely recognized.

For nearly 250 years, the American understanding of religious liberty rested upon a simple constitutional principle: **civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience.** Government protected religious liberty precisely because it limited its own authority. The Commission proposes a different emphasis.

Rather than focusing primarily upon the constitutional limits of civil authority, the report repeatedly encourages a closer relationship between government and religious institutions. That shift becomes especially clear in its discussion of the historic concept of the separation of church and state.

The report states:
"The concept of a 'wall of separation between church and state' can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another... Perhaps a better analogy is that religious liberty acts as a bridge between church and state."

DOJ-RLC Comment-012488

This statement deserves careful consideration because metaphors reveal assumptions. A wall establishes a boundary. A bridge establishes a connection. A wall limits jurisdiction. A bridge facilitates cooperation. Whether one prefers Jefferson's terminology or another expression, the historic American principle remained the same: civil government protects religious liberty by recognizing the limits of its own authority. The Commission's proposed metaphor points in a different direction.

From Protection to Partnership

That change in emphasis is reflected throughout the Commission's report. It recommends expanded cooperation with faith-based organizations, broader opportunities for religious organizations to receive government funding, repeal of the Johnson Amendment, additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life, the creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty, and even points to historical examples of governmental encouragement of Sabbath observance as positive precedents.

Each recommendation may be evaluated on its own merits. Taken together, however, they reveal a consistent shift in emphasis. For nearly two and a half centuries, America's understanding of religious liberty sought to preserve liberty of conscience by carefully limiting the jurisdiction of civil government in matters of religion. The Commission increasingly presents religious liberty not simply as protection from governmental interference, but as a framework for closer institutional cooperation between government and religion.

That distinction is more significant than it first appears. The historic American question was, "Where has God placed the limits of civil authority?" The Commission increasingly asks, "How can government and religion work together to strengthen society?" Those are fundamentally different questions. One preserves liberty by recognizing constitutional limits. The other encourages a closer institutional relationship between government and religion.

History demonstrates why that distinction matters. Once government becomes a partner with religion, it cannot avoid making religious

DOJ-RLC Comment-012489

judgments. It must determine which organizations qualify for public support, which religious practices deserve official recognition, and where the limits are to be drawn. The Commission's favorable reference to Abraham Lincoln's order encouraging Sabbath observance illustrates how quickly these questions move from protecting religious liberty to government encouraging religious practice. Whether future generations apply that principle more broadly, including questions surrounding Sunday observance, is a question Americans should not dismiss lightly.

Whether that shift ultimately strengthens religious liberty or gradually expands the role of civil government in religious affairs is the central question examined throughout this booklet.

Public Religion Is Not the Issue

At this point an important clarification is necessary. Nothing in this discussion suggests that religion should be confined to private life. Scripture teaches the opposite. Jesus preached publicly. The apostles preached publicly. The prophets addressed kings. Christians are called to proclaim the gospel, defend truth, care for the poor, pursue justice, and bear witness before rulers and nations.

The issue has never been whether religion should influence society. The issue is whether civil government should become institutionally involved in religion. Those are fundamentally different questions. A free church should influence the nation through persuasion, preaching, and faithful witness. A constitutional government should protect that freedom without assuming authority over religion itself.

The Question of Jurisdiction

Ultimately, every discussion concerning religious liberty returns to a single question:

What authority has God entrusted to civil government?

Scripture answers that question clearly. Civil government exists to preserve order, protect life, restrain violence, and punish crime. Worship, doctrine, faith, and conscience belong to another jurisdiction, and it is the duty of the civil government to protect the freedom of it.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012490

History repeatedly demonstrates what happens when that distinction is forgotten. Governments that begin by supporting religion eventually find themselves deciding religious questions. Which beliefs qualify for protection? Which religious organizations deserve public support? Which doctrines fall outside acceptable limits? Who determines what constitutes heresy? These questions are unavoidable whenever civil authority crosses into matters of conscience.

That is precisely the danger America's founders sought to prevent.

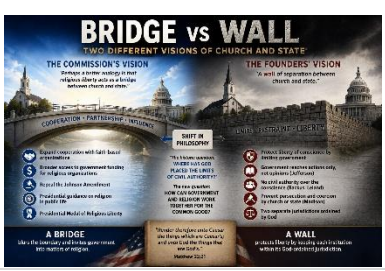
Why This Matters

The issue before America is therefore much larger than a disagreement over a metaphor. The question is whether the constitutional principle that protected liberty of conscience is being quietly redefined.

Replacing a wall with a bridge may sound harmless, but history teaches that liberty is rarely lost in a single dramatic moment. More often it is surrendered gradually, one definition at a time, one principle at a time, until the original safeguards are scarcely recognized.

If America's understanding of religious liberty shifts from protecting the conscience by limiting civil jurisdiction to encouraging institutional alliance between government and religion, then America has begun moving away from the constitutional principles that distinguished it from the Old World.

Before determining whether that shift represents progress or departure, we must first recognize that history itself presents two very different understandings of religious liberty. One sought to preserve liberty by limiting the authority of civil government in matters of religion. The other envisioned a closer relationship between civil authority and religious truth. Understanding those two models is essential before evaluating the direction America is now taking.



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Chapter 4 -Two Competing Historical Understandings of Religious Liberty

By the close of the eighteenth century, the United States had embraced a principle that distinguished it from nearly every nation in the world. Civil government would possess no jurisdiction over the conscience. Religion would neither be established by Congress nor prohibited by Congress, and the free exercise of religion would be protected because the conscience belonged to God alone.

This understanding did not arise in a vacuum. It emerged after centuries of conflict over the relationship between civil government and religion. To appreciate the significance of America's constitutional system, it is necessary to compare it with another historical understanding of religious liberty that prevailed throughout much of Europe for centuries. This comparison is not intended to criticize individuals or denominations. It is simply an examination of two different historical models.

The American Model

The American understanding of religious liberty rested upon one fundamental principle: **civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience.** As we have seen, this conviction was championed by Roger Williams, Isaac Backus, John Leland, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and ultimately embodied in the First Amendment. Though each expressed the principle differently, they agreed that the authority of civil government reached only its proper sphere.

Thomas Jefferson summarized that principle with remarkable clarity when he wrote:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions."

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Jefferson's distinction is both simple and profound. Government reaches actions, not opinions, worship, or conscience. Those belong to God alone.

James Madison expressed the same concern when reflecting upon the religious wars that had devastated Europe:
"The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."

These convictions found constitutional expression in the First Amendment, which prohibited Congress from establishing religion while protecting its free exercise. Under this model, religion remained free because civil government remained limited. The state's responsibility was not to determine religious truth but to protect every citizen's liberty of conscience.

The Historical Papal Model
For many centuries, the relationship between church and civil government developed differently throughout much of Catholic Europe. Rather than treating religion solely as a matter beyond civil jurisdiction, influential papal documents taught that civil society owed duties toward the true religion.

Pope Gregory XVI, writing in *Mirari Vos* (1832), rejected unrestricted liberty of conscience in some of the strongest language of the nineteenth century. Referring to what he viewed as religious indifferentism, he wrote:

"From this poisoned source of indifferentism flows that absurd and erroneous proposition, or rather delirium, that liberty of conscience must be asserted and vindicated for everyone."

Pope Pius IX reaffirmed the same position in *Quanta Cura* (1864), describing liberty of conscience as **"a most pestilential error."**

Pope Leo XIII continued this line of thought in *Libertas* (1888), writing:

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"Let us examine that liberty in individuals which is so opposed to the virtue of religion... A liberty such as we have described... is no liberty, but is degradation."

These statements did not deny the importance of religion. Rather, they reflected a different understanding of the relationship between civil authority and religious truth. Whereas Jefferson argued that religion lies solely between man and God, these papal documents maintained that civil society possesses obligations toward what it understands to be the true religion.

Civil Government and Religious Truth

The difference between these two systems extended beyond abstract principles. Throughout much of European history, civil rulers frequently assisted ecclesiastical authorities in suppressing heresy, enforcing religious conformity, and protecting what was regarded as the true faith. Likewise, church authorities often appealed to civil rulers to carry out judgments that the Church itself could not enforce through spiritual authority alone.

These arrangements varied considerably across countries and centuries, and their legal details changed over time. Nevertheless, they reflected a broader understanding that civil government and ecclesiastical authority could cooperate in matters concerning religion.

By contrast, the American constitutional model deliberately denied civil government jurisdiction over religious doctrine while protecting the liberty of every individual's conscience. The distinction was not merely practical. It represented two fundamentally different understandings of the relationship between church and state.

Two Different Starting Points

Although both systems acknowledged the importance of religion, they began from fundamentally different assumptions.

The American system asked, **What authority has God withheld from civil government?** Its answer was straightforward: **the conscience.** Civil

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government possesses legitimate authority over civil society, but worship, faith, and doctrine remain under God's jurisdiction alone.

The historical European model more often asked, **What duties does civil government owe toward the true religion?** Its answer generally included some form of cooperation between civil authority and religious truth as understood by the Church. Those different starting points produced two distinct understandings of religious liberty.

Why This Comparison Matters

The purpose of this chapter has not been to determine which historical model was correct. It has simply been to establish that two very different understandings of religious liberty existed. One limited civil government to its God-ordained jurisdiction and sought to protect liberty of conscience by restricting governmental authority.

Recognizing that distinction is essential before examining more recent developments. If America's understanding of religious liberty has remained unchanged, then contemporary discussions should reflect the same constitutional limits recognized by the founders. If, however, that understanding has changed, Americans should carefully examine how, why, and with what consequences.

If these two historical models differed so fundamentally, an obvious question arises: Has that difference disappeared, or has it simply been redefined?

To answer that question, we must examine the modern understanding of religious liberty and ask whether it represents a continuation of America's constitutional tradition, a development within Catholic thought, or the emergence of an entirely new relationship between church and state.

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Chapter 5- Vatican II and the Modern Understanding of Religious Liberty

The previous chapter demonstrated that two distinct historical understandings of religious liberty existed for centuries. America's founders understood liberty of conscience to mean that civil government possessed no jurisdiction over matters of faith and worship. Religion belonged to God, while government exercised authority only over civil affairs.

Historical Roman Catholic teaching approached the question differently. As we have seen, Popes Gregory XVI, Pius IX, and Leo XIII each criticized principles associated with unrestricted liberty of conscience and liberty of worship as they were understood in nineteenth-century liberal thought. That historical distinction raises an obvious question: **Did the Roman Catholic Church change its teaching on religious liberty?**

Most Catholics today answer that question by pointing to the Second Vatican Council.

Vatican II and *Dignitatis Humanae*
Between 1962 and 1965, the Roman Catholic Church convened the Second Vatican Council. Among its sixteen major documents was *Dignitatis Humanae* ("Declaration on Religious Freedom"), a document devoted entirely to the subject of religious liberty.

Its opening declaration states:
"The human person has a right to religious freedom."

The document goes on to explain that religious freedom consists in immunity from coercion by individuals, social groups, or civil authority in matters of religion.

To many readers, these statements sound remarkably similar to principles long embraced within the American constitutional tradition. At first glance, one might naturally conclude that the historical debate has been resolved. Yet the matter is more complex than it first appears.

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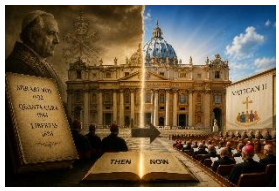
Development Rather Than Contradiction?



The principal debate is not primarily between Protestants and Catholics. It exists within Catholic theology itself.

Catholic theologians generally reject the suggestion that Vatican II contradicted earlier papal teaching. Instead, they argue that doctrine developed. According to Catholic theology, divine truth does not change, but the Church's understanding and application of revealed truth may develop over time. *Dignitatis Humanae* is therefore understood by Catholic scholars not as a rejection of Gregory XVI, Pius IX, or Leo XIII, but as a legitimate development of earlier teaching.

Whether one agrees with that explanation or not, the purpose of this booklet is not to resolve an internal theological debate. It is simply to recognize that the discussion exists.

Public Religion and the Authority to Define Truth

That question becomes especially relevant because Bishop Robert Barron, a member of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, frequently presents Vatican II as one of the great achievements of modern Catholicism. Barron has also argued that religion must not be reduced to merely private belief, stating:
"If you marginalized and privatized religion, democracy is in danger... That's deadly to our democracy."

In the historic Roman Catholic understanding, religion is not merely a matter of private judgment. Religious truth is authoritatively defined by the teaching office of the Church, and the individual conscience is expected to be formed by and submit to that established doctrine rather than independently determining matters of faith. Barron's concern should be understood within that theological tradition.

The American understanding of liberty of conscience begins from a different premise. The individual stands accountable to God. Thomas Jefferson wrote that religion "lies solely between Man & his God," and that the legitimate powers of government reach "actions only, and not

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opinions." Liberty of conscience therefore protects every individual from civil coercion because the conscience answers ultimately to God rather than to the civil magistrate.

If, however, religious truth is authoritatively defined by the Church, then liberty of conscience cannot simply mean that every individual is free to determine truth for himself. *The disagreement is therefore not over the importance of religion, but over the source of religious authority.*

That difference explains why Popes Gregory XVI, Pius IX, and Leo XIII rejected unrestricted liberty of conscience and liberty of worship. Their concern was not merely that religion remain public, but that religious truth not be reduced to private or individual opinion.

The question before America, therefore, is not whether religion should influence society. It always has. The question is whether liberty of conscience belongs to the individual before God, or whether civil society should increasingly recognize and support an established understanding of religious truth.

Looking Ahead

If these two understandings of religious liberty begin from different assumptions about authority, then an important constitutional question follows.

When the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission speaks of strengthening religious liberty, which understanding is it preserving?

Is it preserving the founders' conviction that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience?

Or is it moving toward a closer relationship between civil government and an established understanding of religious truth?

That is the question we now examine.

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Chapter 6 - Does the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Preserve America's Understanding of Religious Liberty?

The previous chapters have established four important principles. First, Scripture teaches that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience. Second, America's founders deliberately incorporated that principle into the Constitution after witnessing centuries of persecution produced by the union of church and state. Third, history has revealed two distinct understandings of religious liberty—one beginning with the liberty of the individual conscience before God, the other beginning with an established understanding of religious truth. Finally, we have seen that the modern discussion of religious liberty cannot be understood apart from this deeper question:

Who possesses authority to define religious truth?
The question before us is therefore straightforward. Does the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission preserve the historic American understanding of liberty of conscience, or does it redefine it? That question cannot be answered by examining motives. It must be answered by examining the Commission's own language, recommendations, and underlying assumptions.

The Commission's Central Claim
The Commission's understanding of religious liberty was expressed not only in its written report but also in the public remarks of its chairman, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, when the report was presented to President Trump.

Referring to the phrase "separation of church and state," Patrick stated: "...the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution... From this day forward, that phrase should have no power over people of all faiths ever again in America."

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This statement deserves careful consideration. Patrick is correct in one respect. The exact phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the Constitution. But that has never been the central question. The real question is whether the Constitution establishes the principle that civil government possesses limited jurisdiction in matters of religion.

As we saw in the previous chapter, America's founders answered that question with remarkable consistency. Roger Williams described a hedge separating the church from the civil power. Isaac Backus distinguished two governments that "ought never to be confounded together." John Leland insisted that government possesses no rightful authority over the conscience. Thomas Jefferson explained that the legitimate powers of government reach "actions only, and not opinions." James Madison defended the same principle, and the First Amendment embodied it in constitutional law. And they defined it as the separation of church and state.

The founders used different language, but they defended the same constitutional limitation. This booklet is not an argument for preserving Jefferson's phrase. It is an argument for preserving the constitutional principle that Jefferson's phrase describes.

With that distinction in mind, we may now examine the Commission's report itself. Perhaps no statement better illustrates the Commission's direction than its discussion of the separation of church and state. The report states:

"The concept of a 'wall of separation between church and state' can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another... Perhaps a better analogy is that religious liberty acts as a bridge between church and state." (Page 22)

At first glance this may appear to be merely a change in terminology. In reality, it represents a different constitutional philosophy. A wall establishes a jurisdictional boundary, while a bridge establishes an institutional connection. Jefferson described the legitimate powers of

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government as reaching "actions only, and not opinions." The Commission instead speaks of building a bridge between church and state. One emphasizes constitutional restraint; the other emphasizes institutional cooperation. The difference is not merely rhetorical. It reflects two different understandings of the relationship between civil government and religion.

That distinction becomes even clearer when the report's recommendations are viewed together. The Commission encourages expanded partnerships between government and faith-based organizations, broader opportunities for religious institutions to receive government funding, repeal of the Johnson Amendment, additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life, and the creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty. Each proposal may certainly be debated on its own merits. Taken together, however, they reveal a consistent direction. Religious liberty is increasingly presented not merely as protection from governmental interference, but as a framework for closer institutional cooperation between government and religion.

One important question naturally follows.

What happens when partnership requires government to make religious decisions?

Every institutional partnership requires standards. Government must determine which organizations qualify for funding, what activities deserve public support, what groups receive official recognition, and where the limits are drawn. Questions that once belonged entirely to the church gradually become questions of public administration.

History demonstrates that this is how jurisdiction slowly expands. The issue is not whether today's officials intend persecution. The issue is whether civil government gradually assumes responsibilities that previous generations believed belonged to the conscience alone. America's founders sought to prevent that progression by limiting governmental jurisdiction from the very beginning.

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At this point an important clarification is necessary. The issue is not whether religion should influence society. It should. Jesus preached publicly. The apostles preached publicly. The prophets addressed kings. Christians should proclaim the gospel, defend truth, strengthen families, care for the poor, and seek justice within their communities. America's founders never intended religion to be confined to private life.

Beyond the Commission

The Commission's recommendations do not exist in isolation. They reflect ideas that have gained increasing influence within broader religious and political circles concerning the proper relationship between Christianity and civil government.

For example, Vice President J. D. Vance has stated that his views on public policy are "pretty aligned with Catholic social teaching." He has also appeared at conferences where influential speakers argued that civil government should be shaped by biblical laws and Christian political principles rather than maintaining the historic constitutional distinction between church and state.

This is significant because Catholic social teaching has long addressed the relationship between the Church and the civil order. Pope Leo XIII, whose social encyclicals laid the foundation for modern Catholic social teaching, urged Catholics:

"All Catholics should do all in their power to cause the constitutions of states, and legislation, to be modeled on the principles of the true Church."

Whether one agrees with Pope Leo XIII or not is not the issue. The issue is that his understanding of civil government differs fundamentally from the understanding articulated by Jefferson, Madison, Backus, Leland, and the First Amendment. One envisions legislation being modeled upon the principles of the Church. The other limits civil government to its God-given jurisdiction while leaving worship and conscience entirely to God.

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The Commission's report likewise presents historical examples of government encouraging religious observance as positive precedents. In its discussion of religious liberty within the military, it approvingly cites President Abraham Lincoln's General Order calling for the orderly observance of the Sabbath within the Army and Navy. Because Lincoln's order referred to Sunday observance, the report treats governmental encouragement of religious observance as part of America's constitutional tradition rather than asking whether such measures fall within the proper jurisdiction of civil government.

Yet this is precisely the constitutional question. Is encouraging religious observance one of the civil magistrate's God-given responsibilities, or does it move civil government beyond the jurisdiction God assigned it?

None of these examples—considered individually—proves that America has abandoned its historic understanding of liberty of conscience. Viewed together, however, they point in the same direction.

Dan Patrick argues that the principle of separation should lose its influence. The Commission proposes replacing a wall with a bridge. Bishop Barron argues against reducing religion to private judgment. J. D. Vance openly embraces Catholic social teaching as a model for public policy. The Commission cites governmental encouragement of Sunday observance as part of America's constitutional tradition.

The significance of these examples is not that they are identical. It is that they all move in the same direction—away from asking where government must stop and toward asking how government can promote religion.

That represents a significant shift from the constitutional philosophy of the founders, who believed religion was strongest when civil government remained within the limits God had assigned it.

The issue is not whether religion should be public.
The issue is whether civil government should become institutionally responsible for religion.

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A free church influencing society through preaching, persuasion, education, charity, and moral example is entirely consistent with liberty of conscience. Government becoming institutionally responsible for religion is something altogether different.

Ultimately, every discussion concerning religious liberty returns to a single question:

Who possesses jurisdiction over the conscience?
Scripture answers that question by placing the conscience under God's authority alone. Jefferson answered by insisting that government reaches actions only, not opinions. The First Amendment answered by prohibiting Congress from establishing religion while protecting its free exercise. The founders consistently protected liberty by limiting governmental authority.

The Commission, however, repeatedly shifts the emphasis from constitutional restraint toward institutional cooperation between government and religion. That is why replacing the wall with a bridge is so significant. The metaphor reflects an entirely different constitutional philosophy.

History repeatedly demonstrates a remarkably consistent pattern. Churches seek governmental assistance. Government provides support. Support gradually becomes oversight. Oversight becomes regulation. Regulation becomes influence. Influence eventually reaches the conscience. This progression seldom begins with persecution. More often it begins with cooperation, mutual benefit, and the best of intentions. America's founders understood that danger. They did not establish constitutional restraints because they distrusted Christianity. They established them because they understood human nature and recognized that concentrated power, whether exercised by church or state, has a tendency to exceed its proper limits.

The Commission repeatedly asks how religion can strengthen America. That is a worthy question. A more fundamental question is this:

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How can America preserve liberty of conscience while religion continues to strengthen society?
For nearly two and a half centuries the American answer has been remarkably consistent. Religion remains entirely free. Government remains constitutionally limited. The church influences society through preaching, education, charity, and moral persuasion, while government protects that freedom without becoming religion's institutional partner.

The purpose of this booklet has never been to argue that religion should retreat from public life. Christianity should continue to influence society through faithful preaching, compassionate ministry, education, charity, and moral leadership.

The question has always been one of jurisdiction.

Who governs the conscience?

Christ answered that question before Pilate.
America's founders answered it in the Constitution.
History answered it through centuries of persecution.

The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission now asks America to reconsider it.

Every generation must decide whether civil government will remain within the limits God assigned it, or whether it will gradually assume authority over matters that belong to God alone.

The conscience belongs to God. Caesar has no rightful claim upon it.

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Chapter 7 -The Final Test of Liberty of Conscience

Throughout this study we have examined religious liberty from three perspectives. We began with Scripture, where Christ distinguished His kingdom from the kingdoms of this world and declared that His servants do not advance His cause through civil force. We then examined the constitutional principles embraced by America's founders, who recognized that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience. Finally, we considered the recommendations of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission and asked whether they preserve that historic understanding or move in a different direction.

These questions are important not merely because they concern constitutional history. According to Bible prophecy, they become central in the closing conflict between Christ and Satan.

From Genesis to Revelation, the great controversy has never centered merely upon politics, economics, or civil government. At its heart lies the question of worship. Who is worthy of worship? Who possesses authority over the conscience? Who determines religious truth? These questions reach their climax in Revelation 13, where worship is enforced by civil authority under the threat of economic sanctions and ultimately death. The final conflict is therefore not fundamentally political. It is a conflict over jurisdiction. Who has authority over worship? God or the state?

Jesus answered that question before Pilate:
"My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight." (John 18:36)

Throughout this booklet we have returned repeatedly to these words because they establish the biblical boundary between Christ's kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. Civil government bears the sword to preserve public order. Christ governs the conscience through truth, love, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Genuine worship cannot be compelled because it must arise from a willing heart.

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The book of Daniel illustrates this same principle. In Daniel 3, Nebuchadnezzar erected a golden image and commanded every nation to worship it under penalty of death. In Daniel 6, another decree prohibited prayer to anyone except the king. In both instances, the issue was not whether civil government existed. God Himself had ordained civil government. The issue was whether civil rulers possessed authority over worship. The faithful obeyed the king in every lawful matter, but when civil authority claimed jurisdiction over the conscience, they obeyed God rather than men.

Revelation presents the same issue on a worldwide scale. The beast receives worship. An image to the beast is formed. The second beast causes the inhabitants of the earth to worship the first beast. The prophecy is not merely predicting persecution. It is predicting the reappearance of the same governing principle that has appeared throughout history: civil authority assuming jurisdiction over worship.

An image reflects the character of the original. The medieval system united ecclesiastical authority with civil power to enforce religious conformity. Revelation predicts not merely another persecution, but the reappearance of that governing principle. Whenever civil government assumes authority over worship, the image begins to form because the same relationship between church and state has returned.

America's Providential Beginning

Ellen White understood that the rise of the United States occupied a unique place in prophecy. Before describing America's future role in Revelation 13, she first explained why the nation became such a powerful defender of liberty of conscience.

She wrote:

"Among the Christian exiles who first fled to America and sought an asylum from royal oppression and priestly intolerance were many who

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determined **to establish a government upon the broad foundation of civil and religious liberty**.... Freedom of religious faith was also granted, every man being permitted to worship God according to the dictates of **his conscience**.... **Republicanism and Protestantism became the fundamental principles of the nation**. These principles are the secret of its power and prosperity." *(The Great Controversy, p. 441.)*

This statement deserves careful attention. Ellen White identifies two principles that distinguished America from the nations of Europe.

Republicanism recognized that civil authority derives its just powers from the consent of the governed rather than from ecclesiastical control or hereditary monarchy.

Protestantism, in its historic sense, represented more than a collection of denominations. It embodied the great protest against the union of church and state that had dominated much of medieval Europe through the Papal church. It affirmed the supremacy of Scripture, the direct accountability of every individual to God, and the liberty of every person to worship according to the dictates of conscience without civil coercion.

Together these principles established constitutional restraints that protected liberty of conscience unlike any nation before it.

Liberty Must Be Extended to Everyone

Yet Ellen White was equally careful not to idealize America's beginnings. Although many of the early colonists came seeking freedom from religious persecution, they did not always extend that same freedom to others.

She observed:

"Yet honest and God-fearing as they were, the Pilgrims did not yet comprehend the great principle of religious toleration. The freedom which they sacrificed so much to secure for themselves, they were not equally ready to grant to others." *(The Great Controversy, p. 292.)*

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She then describes what happened when church and civil authority became united in the Massachusetts Bay Colony:

"The regulation was adopted by the colonists, that only church-members should have a voice in the civil government.... A kind of State church was formed... the magistrates being authorized to suppress heresy. Thus the secular power was in the hands of the church. It was not long before these measures led to the inevitable result—persecution." *(The Great Controversy, p. 293.)*

The lesson is unmistakable. Even sincere and devoted Christians can repeat the mistakes of history whenever civil government assumes authority over religion. The problem was never Christianity itself. The problem was the union of ecclesiastical authority with the coercive power of the state.

The Prophetic Warning

Having explained both America's strengths and its early failures, Ellen White then looked forward to the final crisis.

She summarized the biblical principle in these words:
"To protect liberty of conscience is the duty of the state, and this is the limit of its authority in matters of religion." *(The Great Controversy, p. 201.)*

This statement perfectly harmonizes with the teachings of Christ, the apostles, and the principles embraced by America's founders. Civil government is ordained by God, but its authority has divinely established limits. It exists to preserve justice and civil order, not to govern worship or the conscience.

Because of this principle, Ellen White repeatedly warned against every movement that would weaken the constitutional restraints protecting liberty of conscience. Writing in 1900, she declared:

"An amendment to the Constitution restricting liberty of conscience, has long been urged upon the legislators of the nation; and the question of

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enforcing Sunday observance has become one of national importance. Are we ready for the issue involved in the Sunday movement?" *(Signs of the Times, November 28, 1900.)*

It is significant that she begins, not with Sunday, but with **"an amendment to the Constitution restricting liberty of conscience."** The prophetic issue is constitutional before it is ceremonial. Sunday legislation becomes significant because it represents civil government exercising authority over worship.

Her warning becomes even more direct in *The Great Controversy*:

"Let the restraints now imposed by secular governments be removed and Rome be reinstated in her former power, and there would speedily be a revival of her tyranny and persecution." *(The Great Controversy, p. 564.)*

Throughout this booklet we have identified those restraints. They are the constitutional principles that deny civil government jurisdiction over the conscience and protect every individual's right to worship according to the dictates of conscience. Remove those restraints, and history demonstrates what follows. The issue is not merely one religious observance or another. The issue is whether civil government possesses authority to command worship.

Conclusion
This brings us back to the question that has guided this entire study.

Who possesses jurisdiction over the conscience?

Scripture answers: God.
Christ answered: God.

America's founders sought to preserve that principle by carefully limiting the jurisdiction of civil government.

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Ellen White warned that the final conflict would arise when those constitutional restraints began to disappear.

As America commemorates 250 years of constitutional government, the preservation of liberty of conscience deserves more than patriotic celebration. It deserves careful vigilance. Liberty has rarely been lost all at once. More often it has been redefined—gradually, respectfully, and with the best of intentions. The issue has never been whether religion should influence society. The issue has always been whether civil government should exercise authority over worship.

That question stood before Nebuchadnezzar.
It stood before Darius.
It stood before Pilate.
It confronted the Pilgrims as they struggled to extend the liberty they themselves had sought.

According to Revelation, it will soon stand before the entire world once again.

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Appendix A

Selected Statements from the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
The purpose of this appendix is to provide several representative statements from the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission and its members that are discussed throughout this booklet. They are presented so readers may examine the Commission's own language alongside the constitutional and biblical principles discussed in the preceding chapters.

1. Dan Patrick -Chairman, Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
On "Separation of Church and State"
"...the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution... From this day forward, that phrase should have no power over people of all faiths ever again in America."

2. Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Report
From a Wall to a Bridge
"The concept of a 'wall of separation between church and state' can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another... Perhaps a better analogy is that religious liberty acts as a bridge between church and state."

3. Recommendations of the Commission
Among the recommendations discussed in this booklet are:

- Expanded partnerships between government and faith-based organizations.
- Increased opportunities for religious organizations to participate in government funding.
- Repeal of the Johnson Amendment.
- Additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life.
- Creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty.

These recommendations are presented by the Commission as ways to strengthen religious liberty.

4. Bishop Robert Barron - Member, Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
On Religion in Public Life
"If you marginalized and privatized religion, democracy is in danger... Values is up to me. My gender, it's up to me. The whole structure of my life, it's my choice. That's deadly to our democracy."

Questions for the Reader
After reading the report and the statements above, consider the following questions:

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- Does the Commission define religious liberty in the same way America's founders defined it?
- Does replacing a "wall" with a "bridge" preserve the constitutional limits placed upon civil government, or does it encourage a different relationship between government and religion?
- Can government become an institutional partner with religion while remaining outside the jurisdiction of the conscience?
- How should Christians encourage religion's influence upon society while preserving the constitutional principle that civil government possesses no authority over worship?

These are the questions this booklet has sought to examine.

Appendix B
The Great Controversy over Liberty of Conscience- A Biblical and Historical Timeline
c. 605 B.C. — Daniel 3: Worship by Civil Decree
King Nebuchadnezzar erects a golden image and commands all nations to worship it under penalty of death. The issue is not civil government itself, but civil government exercising authority over worship.
c. 539 B.C. — Daniel 6: Prayer Forbidden
King Darius signs a decree prohibiting prayer to anyone except the king for thirty days. Daniel obeys the king in all lawful matters but refuses to surrender his conscience to civil authority.
A.D. 31 — Christ Before Pilate
Jesus declares: *"My kingdom is not of this world... if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight."*
Christ distinguishes His kingdom from the kingdoms of this world and establishes the biblical boundary between civil authority and the conscience.
A.D. 31 — "Render Unto Caesar"
Jesus teaches that Caesar has legitimate authority—but only within the sphere God has assigned him.
A.D. 31–33 — The Apostles Before the Sanhedrin
Peter declares: *"We ought to obey God rather than men."*
The apostles recognize the legitimacy of civil authority while affirming that God's authority over the conscience is supreme

The Development of American Religious Liberty
1636 — Roger Williams Calls for a "hedge or wall of separation" protecting the church from civil power.
1773–1774 — Isaac Backus Distinguishes the two governments ordained by God that "ought never to be confounded together."
1780s — John Leland Argues that liberty of conscience is far more than mere toleration because government possesses no rightful authority over religion.
1785 — James Madison Publishes his *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, defending liberty of conscience and arguing that religion is exempt from

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the authority of civil society.
1791 — The First Amendment Congress is forbidden from establishing religion while protecting its free exercise.
1790 — George Washington Promises that the United States gives "to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."
1802 — Thomas Jefferson Describes the First Amendment as building "a wall of separation between Church & State."

The Historical Debate
1832 — Gregory XVI *Mirari Vos* Rejects unrestricted liberty of conscience.
1864 — Pius IX *Quanta Cura* Describes liberty of conscience as "a most pestilential error."
1888 — Leo XIII *Libertas* Argues that unrestricted liberty of worship is not true liberty.
1965 — Vatican II *Dignitatis Humanae* Affirms immunity from coercion in religious matters while presenting this as a development of Catholic teaching. Yet, claiming not to have changed.

The Prophetic Perspective
1900 — Ellen White
Warns of efforts to amend the Constitution restricting liberty of conscience and identifies this as the beginning of the Sunday movement.

The Great Controversy
States: "To protect liberty of conscience is the duty of the state, and this is the limit of its authority in matters of religion."

She also warns: "Let the restraints now imposed by secular governments be removed... there would speedily be a revival of her tyranny and persecution."

Today -2026 — Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
The Commission recommends a "bridge" rather than a "wall" between church and state and calls for expanded institutional cooperation between government and religion, raising the constitutional questions examined throughout this booklet.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012514

TWO VISIONS.
ONE FUTURE.
THE CHOICE IS BEFORE US.
We The People
CHURCH ABOVE STATE
COMPULSION.
PERSECUTION.
LOST CONSCIENCE.
GOD ABOVE ALL CONSCIENCE BEFORE GOD LIBERTY
FREEDOM.
CONSCIENCE.
LIMITED GOVERNMENT.
WHICH FOUNDATION WILL AMERICA CHOOSE?
A BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL STUDY OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, CHURCH AND STATE, AND THE CONFLICT OF THE AGES.
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THE END IS NEAR.

From: Ginger Brooks <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church & State (Ginger Brooks)
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:28:56 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:
In order to keep freedoms in our great country, I agree with the Pillar of Freedom's stance in Separation of Church and State and issues surrounding it. Please continue to keep church and state separate for the good of both. I think if we don't keep them separate that even the non-religious people won't have freedom. When church & state unite, then the government can then take liberty of proclaiming one religion over another & by force take other people's freedom away that don't agree with that religion. God wants our worship to be our choice, not forced one way or another. Thank you for considering my request in this important matter.

Sincerely,
Ginger Brooks
Johnson City, TN

From: conrad dubois <[redacted]>
To: <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:34:16 -0400
Importance: Normal

We need the separation and wall of religious liberty to stay in place. Without it we will have persecution of minorities

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone

From: Peter Kovacs <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Peter L. Kovacs
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:35:05 -0400
Importance: Normal

Why the Establishment Clause Matters *A Historical Appeal to Preserve Religious Liberty*

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:,

I write to you as an American citizen who deeply values both religious faith and the constitutional liberties that have protected it for nearly two and a half centuries. My purpose is not to diminish the importance of religion in American life, nor to argue that faith should be absent from the public square. Rather, I write to explain why the Founders deliberately denied the federal government the authority to establish, promote, or enforce religion, or religious practices and why preserving that constitutional limitation remains essential to protecting both religious liberty and constitutional government.

The First Amendment begins with a remarkable limitation on governmental power:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Those words were not chosen casually. They were written by men who had studied history, witnessed religious persecution firsthand, and understood the dangers that arise whenever civil government assumes authority over matters of conscience.

The Establishment Clause is often misunderstood as a restriction on religion or on the practice of one's faith, including by those serving in public office. In reality, it is a limitation on government. It protects churches from governmental control just as much as it protects citizens from governmental coercion in matters of faith. The Founders believed that genuine religion must be embraced freely, not compelled by law.

This principle was born from history.

For centuries, Europe witnessed the consequences of governments joining themselves to established churches. Political rulers frequently used religion to consolidate power, while established churches often relied upon civil authority to enforce religious conformity. Although the details varied across nations and generations, the

pattern remained remarkably consistent. Those whose beliefs differed from the established religion often faced fines, imprisonment, confiscation of property, exile, or worse.

The lesson learned by the American Founders was not that religion was dangerous, but that government should never possess authority over religion. Neither should the church possess direct authority over the government.

Many of those who settled America came seeking relief from political oppression and religious persecution. While the colonies themselves were not always models of religious liberty, the experiences of colonial America reinforced the same lesson that Europe had already demonstrated: whenever government determines which religious beliefs receive official favor, the liberty of those who dissent is placed at risk.

No colony better illustrates this than Virginia.

During the colonial period, the Church of England served as Virginia's established church. Ministers outside that establishment could be required to obtain government approval before preaching. Baptist ministers who refused to submit to these requirements were often arrested, fined, imprisoned, or harassed. Historical records from Culpeper, Spotsylvania, Orange County, and other Virginia communities document repeated instances of civil authorities punishing ministers whose only offense was preaching according to their convictions.

James Madison personally witnessed these events during his youth. His correspondence reveals deep concern over the persecution of Baptist ministers, and his relationships with Virginia Baptists profoundly influenced his understanding of religious liberty. These experiences ultimately led him to author the *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, one of the clearest defenses of liberty of conscience ever written.

Madison concluded that religion could not be entrusted to the authority of government because matters of conscience lie beyond the legitimate jurisdiction of civil power.

Roger Williams reached the same conclusion more than a century earlier. After being banished from Massachusetts for his religious views, he founded Rhode Island on the revolutionary principle that civil government should not exercise authority over religious belief. His writings described a protective boundary between church and civil government—a principle intended to preserve the integrity of both institutions.

Thomas Jefferson likewise affirmed these principles through the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, declaring that civil rights should never depend upon religious opinions and that government possesses no

rightful authority over the human conscience. Likewise, the Church has no legitimate right to use state power (legislation) to impose its dogmas.

Together, these ideas formed the philosophical foundation of the First Amendment.

The historical circumstances surrounding its adoption are especially instructive. At the time the Constitution was ratified, several states still maintained officially recognized denominations. Many feared that the newly created federal government might establish a national church different from their own state traditions. Rather than choosing one denomination over another, Madison proposed removing the power of religious establishment from Congress entirely. By denying the federal government jurisdiction over religion, every citizen—and every state—would enjoy greater liberty.

This constitutional design has served our nation extraordinarily well.

Religion in America has flourished not because government established it, but because government lacked the authority to control it.

Yet history also demonstrates what occurs whenever civil government attempts to enforce religious observance.

In the nineteenth century, Sunday laws were enacted and enforced in various states against citizens who's sincerely held religious convictions led them to observe a Sabbath on Saturday rather than Sunday. Historical records from Arkansas, Tennessee, and elsewhere document prosecutions that resulted in fines, imprisonment, and severe hardship for families whose only offense was following the dictates of conscience. These laws remind us that even legislation enacted with sincere religious intentions can produce injustice when government assumes authority over religious practice.

Congress itself confronted these constitutional questions during the debates surrounding Senator Henry W. Blair's Sunday Rest Bill in the late 1880s. Extensive hearings examined whether the federal government should legislate religious observance. The constitutional arguments presented then remain remarkably relevant today. Congress ultimately recognized the wisdom of preserving the principle that civil authority should not be used to compel religious observance.

These historical episodes are not merely interesting stories from our past. They explain why the First Amendment was written as it was. The Founders did not distrust religion. They distrusted governmental power over religion.

That distinction remains vital.

The Constitution does not prevent Americans from living according to their faith. It prevents government from compelling faith, selecting preferred religious doctrines, or punishing citizens whose beliefs differ from those of the majority. This protection extends equally to every American, regardless of religious tradition or lack thereof.

As Congress considers questions touching upon religion and public policy, I respectfully ask that you remember the historical reasons the Establishment Clause was adopted. The constitutional balance established by the Founders has allowed both religious liberty and vibrant religious life to flourish. It deserves careful preservation.

History has already demonstrated the consequences of allowing government to exercise authority over matters of conscience. The wisdom of the First Amendment lies in recognizing that such authority does not belong to government at all.

Thank you for your service to our country and for your thoughtful consideration of these concerns.

I have included two appendices with historical precedence on this subject below.

Respectfully,

Peter L. Kovacs

Appendix A

Historical References Supporting the Constitutional Principle of Religious Liberty

Purpose of This Appendix

The following historical references provide the foundation for the arguments presented in **"Why the Establishment Clause Matters: A Historical Appeal to Preserve Religious Liberty."**

These sources represent the historical documents, legal records, writings, and congressional proceedings that shaped the development of religious liberty in America and influenced the adoption of the First Amendment.

The purpose of this appendix is not to argue that religion should be excluded from public life. Rather, these references demonstrate the historical reasons the Founders concluded that civil government should not possess authority to establish, regulate, or enforce religion.

I. Historical Background: Limits on Government Authority

Magna Carta (1215)

Reference: *Magna Carta Libertatum* (1215)

Historical significance:

The Magna Carta was one of the earliest Western constitutional documents establishing the principle that rulers are subject to legal limits. Although it was not a modern declaration of religious liberty, it contributed to the broader constitutional tradition that governmental authority must be restrained.

Relevance to religious liberty:

The principle that government power must have limits became foundational to later arguments that civil authorities should not control matters of conscience.

II. Church and State in Europe

European Religious Establishments and the Reformation Era (16th–18th Centuries)

Historical references include:

- Acts of Supremacy (England, 1534 and subsequent legislation)
- English religious conformity laws
- European religious wars following the Protestant Reformation
- Records of Catholic and Protestant state establishments

Historical significance:

Throughout Europe, governments frequently aligned themselves with particular religious institutions. In many cases, civil authorities enforced religious conformity through law.

Relevance to religious liberty:

The persecution of religious minorities under various governments demonstrated to later generations that government authority over religion often resulted in oppression of dissenting beliefs.

III. Roger Williams and Rhode Island

Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience* (1644)

Author: Roger Williams

Historical significance:

Roger Williams argued that civil government had no authority over matters of faith and conscience.

Relevance to religious liberty:

Williams advanced the idea that religious liberty required a separation between civil authority and religious institutions. His writings became influential in the development of American religious liberty principles.

Founding of Rhode Island (1636)

Historical references include:

- Providence settlement records

- Rhode Island colonial charter documents

Historical significance:

Rhode Island was founded upon principles of broader religious liberty than existed in many neighboring colonies.

Relevance to religious liberty:

It demonstrated that diverse religious communities could coexist without government establishing a single religious authority.

IV. Religious Persecution in Colonial Virginia

Virginia's Established Church System

Historical references include:

- Virginia colonial laws
- Records of the Church of England establishment in Virginia
- Colonial court records

Historical significance:

Before and during the early colonial period, Virginia maintained the Church of England as its established church.

Relevance to religious liberty:

Government authority was used to regulate religious practice, creating conflicts with religious dissenters.

Baptist Persecution in Virginia

Historical references include:

- Culpeper County court records
- Spotsylvania County records
- Orange County records
- Baptist petitions and historical accounts

Historical significance:

Baptist ministers were arrested, fined, imprisoned, and harassed for preaching without approval from the established church.

Relevance to religious liberty:

These events influenced Virginia leaders, including James Madison, and contributed to the movement for disestablishment and religious freedom.

V. James Madison and the Constitutional Foundation

James Madison, *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments* (1785)

Author: James Madison

Historical significance:

Madison wrote this document opposing a proposal that would provide government support for religion in Virginia.

Relevance to religious liberty:

It expressed Madison's belief that religion must be protected from governmental interference and that civil authority should not determine religious matters.

Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1786)

Author: Thomas Jefferson
Legislative champion: James Madison

Historical significance:

This statute ended state support for an established church in Virginia.

Relevance to religious liberty:

It became one of the most important American precedents for protecting freedom of conscience.

First Amendment to the United States Constitution (1791)

Reference: United States Constitution, Amendment I

Historical significance:

The First Amendment prohibited Congress from making laws establishing religion or restricting its free exercise.

Relevance to religious liberty:

It created a constitutional boundary preventing federal control over religion.

VI. Congressional Consideration of Religious Legislation

Senator Henry W. Blair's Sunday Rest Bill (1888)

Reference:

Congressional hearings on the proposed Sunday Rest Bill, 50th Congress, 1st Session.

Historical significance:

Congress considered federal legislation recognizing Sunday rest requirements.

Relevance to religious liberty:

The hearings addressed whether the federal government had constitutional authority to legislate religious observance.

National Reform Association and Proposed Christian Amendment (Late 1800s)

Historical references include:

- Congressional petitions
- Religious organization records
- Public debates concerning constitutional amendments

Historical significance:

Some groups sought formal recognition of Christianity within the Constitution.

Relevance to religious liberty:

The debate demonstrated continuing concerns about government involvement in religious matters.

VII. Blue Laws and Religious Enforcement

Arkansas Sunday Law Cases

Historical references include:

- Arkansas statutes
- Court proceedings
- Contemporary accounts from religious communities

Historical significance:

Individuals were prosecuted for violating Sunday laws despite observing their own religious Sabbath traditions.

Relevance to religious liberty:

These cases demonstrate the consequences of government enforcing religious practices favored by the majority.

Tennessee Sunday Law Cases

Historical references include:

- Tennessee statutes
- Court records
- Historical accounts of prosecutions

Historical significance:

Citizens were fined, imprisoned, and subjected to forced labor for violating Sunday restrictions.

Relevance to religious liberty:

These examples illustrate why constitutional protections were created to prevent government from imposing religious obligations.

VIII. Supreme Court Interpretations

***Reynolds v. United States* (1879)**

Historical significance:

The Supreme Court examined the relationship between religious belief, religious practice, and civil law.

Relevance:

The decision addressed the limits of religious conduct when interacting with generally applicable laws.

***Everson v. Board of Education* (1947)**

Historical significance:

The Supreme Court examined the meaning and application of the Establishment Clause.

Relevance:

The decision became one of the major modern interpretations of the constitutional relationship between government and religion.

Conclusion

These historical sources demonstrate the reasoning behind the First Amendment:

1. Government authority over religion has repeatedly resulted in the suppression of religious minorities.
2. Religious institutions are strongest when they operate through persuasion rather than governmental power.
3. Civil government protects religious liberty best when it neither establishes nor interferes with religion.
4. The Establishment Clause was created to preserve freedom of conscience for all Americans.

This is the appendix draft. In the next version, I would recommend adding **actual citations in footnote format** (for example: *Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance, 1785, paragraph X*) so the final document has the appearance and authority of a legal memorandum.

I can do that. This is a good time to build the source foundation because the quotations will help determine the tone and structure of the final memorandum.

I will start with a **quotation appendix draft**. I will keep the excerpts short and focused, and include the source and relevance. Later, we can verify exact wording, editions, paragraph numbers, and citation format before the final publication-style version.

Appendix B

Selected Primary-Source Quotations on Religious Liberty and the Separation of Civil and Religious Authority

I. Roger Williams — *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience* (1644)

Historical Context

Roger Williams argued that civil government should not compel religious belief or regulate matters of conscience. His writings were among the earliest systematic arguments in English for religious liberty.

Quotation

"God requireth not a uniformity of religion to be enacted and enforced in any civil state; which enforced uniformity (sooner or later) is the greatest occasion of civil war, ravishing of conscience, persecution of Christ Jesus in his servants, and of hypocrisy and destruction of millions of souls."

Source: Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience* (1644)

Relevance:

Williams argued that forced religious uniformity does not strengthen faith; it corrupts religion by replacing conviction with government coercion.

II. James Madison — *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments* (1785)

Historical Context

Madison wrote this document opposing a Virginia proposal to provide government financial support for religious teachers. It became one of the foundational statements of American religious liberty.

Quotation

"The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man."

Source: James Madison, *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, Argument 1 (1785)

Relevance:

Madison identified conscience—not government—as the proper authority in matters of religion.

Quotation

"It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage and such only as he believes to be acceptable to him."

Source: James Madison, *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, Argument 1 (1785)

Relevance:

Madison argued that religious obligation arises from an individual's relationship with God, not from governmental authority.

Quotation

"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?"

Source: James Madison, *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, Argument 3 (1785)

Relevance:

Madison recognized that once government possesses authority to establish religion, there is no reliable way to prevent favoritism or discrimination.

III. Thomas Jefferson — Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1786)

Historical Context

The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, drafted by Jefferson and enacted through Madison's legislative efforts, became one of the most important American statements of religious liberty.

Quotation

"No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever…"

Source: Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1786)

Relevance:

The statute rejected government-supported religion and protected individuals from compelled religious participation.

Quotation

"All men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion…"

Source: Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1786)

Relevance:

Jefferson emphasized that religious truth should be defended through persuasion rather than government force.

IV. Thomas Jefferson — Letter to the Danbury Baptist Association (1802)

Historical Context

Jefferson wrote this letter in response to Connecticut Baptists who expressed concern that their religious liberty was vulnerable.

Quotation

"I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.'"

Source: Thomas Jefferson, Letter to the Danbury Baptist Association (1802)

Relevance:

Jefferson described the First Amendment as a deliberate act protecting religious liberty.

Quotation

"A wall of separation between Church & State."

Source: Thomas Jefferson, Letter to the Danbury Baptist Association (1802)

Relevance:

Jefferson used this phrase to describe the constitutional boundary preventing government establishment of religion.

V. First Amendment to the United States Constitution (1791)

Quotation

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof…"

Source: United States Constitution, Amendment I

Relevance:

The First Amendment contains two protections:

- Government cannot establish religion.
- Government cannot prohibit religious exercise.

Together, these clauses protect both religious liberty and governmental neutrality.

VI. George Washington — Letter to the United Baptist Churches in Virginia (1789)

Historical Context

Washington responded to Baptist leaders concerned about religious liberty under the new Constitution.

Quotation

"If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension that the Constitution framed in the Convention where I had the honor to preside, might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical society, certainly I would never have placed my signature to it."

Source: George Washington, Letter to the United Baptist Churches in Virginia (May 1789)

Relevance:

Washington assured Baptists that the new constitutional system would protect religious liberty.

VII. John Locke — *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689)

Historical Context

Locke's writings influenced later arguments for religious toleration among many Enlightenment thinkers and American founders.

Quotation

"The care of souls is not committed to the civil magistrate, any more than to other men."

Source: John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689)

Relevance:

Locke argued that government lacks authority over spiritual matters because faith cannot be produced by force.

VIII. Congressional Debate: Blair Sunday Rest Bill (1888)

Historical Context

Congress considered legislation that would have promoted Sunday observance at the federal level. Opponents argued that such legislation would place the government in the role of enforcing religious practice.

Sources:

- Senate Committee on Education and Labor hearings, *Sunday Rest Bill*, 50th Congress, 1st Session (1888).
- Testimony from Alonzo T. Jones before the Senate Committee, *National Sunday Law*, A.T. Jones (1888).

Relevance:

These hearings demonstrate that the constitutional questions surrounding government involvement in religious observance were debated extensively more than a century ago.

IX. Benjamin Franklin and the Independence of Religion from Civil Power

Benjamin Franklin — Letter to Richard Price (1780)

Historical Context:

Benjamin Franklin wrote to Dr. Richard Price, a prominent political philosopher and minister, during a period when debates over religious establishments and government-supported religion remained active in America and Britain.

Quotation:

“When a Religion is good, I conceive that it will support itself; and, when it cannot support itself, and God does not take care to support, so that its Professors are obliged to call for the help of the Civil Power, ’tis a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one.”

Relevance:

Franklin expressed the principle that true religion does not require governmental force for its preservation. His statement reflects a broader Founding-era belief that faith is strongest when sustained by conviction rather than civil authority.

Preliminary Observation

Taken together, these primary sources reveal a consistent theme:

- Williams argued that government should not control conscience.
- Madison argued that religion belongs to individual conviction rather than civil authority.
- Jefferson argued that government should neither establish nor interfere with religion.
- Washington assured religious minorities that the Constitution protected their rights.
- The First Amendment transformed these principles into constitutional law.

The historical record indicates that the Founders did not seek to weaken religion. They sought to prevent the use of governmental power as an instrument of religion.

From: Deborah Keller <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment-Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:35:14 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As an American citizen, I find it very troubling that the commission wants to remove the wall of separation between Church and State and replace it with a bridge. As a Christian, I believe it's best to keep politics out of the church, so the church may remain free from political influence. It is also not wise for the church to be in a position to influence the government by pushing their agendas into the political arena. Both would suffer from that decision. History has shown this very phenomenon. Please keep the wall of separation between Church and State. Also, please do not repeal the Johnson amendment.

Sincerely,

Deborah Keller

From: Joy Prochaska <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Johnson Amendment
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:35:24 -0400
Importance: Normal

I respectfully object to the recommendations made by the RLC.
Thank you,
J Prochaska

From: Christine Hollifieldo <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:36:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

In Mark 12:17 is stated, "Render to Caesar (government) the things that are Caesar's, and to God (the Father God in Heaven) the things that are God's."
Please Keep the Church and the State separated so that we can still have freedom of religious choices.
This country, the United States of America was built for religious freedom (choices).
I will be praying for the committee involved in this issue.

From: M Rudy <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:36:37 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I was troubled to read that the Commission proposes replacing the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." With respect, I believe that gets it exactly backwards. As a person of faith, I find the idea deeply concerning.

The wall of separation wasn't created by secularists to keep religion down. It was established to protect religious freedom by keeping government out of the affairs of the church. A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government funding, political influence, and partisan pressure to enter. Before long, churches are competing for grants and answering to politicians instead of to God.

History shows what happens when church and state become intertwined, and the outcome has rarely served either institution well.

Please don't build that bridge. Keep the wall. It protects the independence of the church far more than it limits it, and it helps preserve the religious liberty of all Americans.

Sincerely,

Mary Rudy.

Woodbridge VA

From: Ed Woods <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state.
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:38:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

Sent from my iphone This country was founded on religious freedom and before the constitution were persecuted by the Catholic Church. Thus it was their intention to stop tyranny by the church and state by keeping them separate. Congress shall make no law respecting a specific religion. Please do not pass any legislation or committee to give preference to any religion and thus return to persecution of those who may have a different religion.

From: Chad Mejeur <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:38:48 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a grateful citizen and patriot of the United States. I am writing to thank the Religious Liberty Commission for doing some good work in defending the Free Exercise Clause and express my concern with its dismissive approach to the Establishment Clause and the Separation of Church and State.

Today, I think it's important to remember that we can thank Christians for the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment of the US Constitution. The first person in the American colonies to keep the church out of government and the government out of church was Roger Williams, a devout Christian pastor. He fought for this new arrangement because of the religious persecution that he and millions of others experienced in Europe and the American colonies. He saw the results of churches who persecuted dissenters and he was committed to the example of Jesus who never forced anybody and declared, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

The disestablishment of church was an extraordinary achievement that has contributed significantly to America's success. As somebody who belongs to a religious minority, I am alarmed at the new willingness to redefine the Establishment Clause to accommodate a much closer union of church and state that will inevitably favor larger religions. The Founding Fathers gave us the Establishment Clause to protect against religious tyranny and the Free Exercise Clause to protect against secular tyranny. When the two are out of balance the future of religious liberty in America is threatened.

Specific areas of concern from your report include:

* It sets a dangerous precedent when you openly oppose the separation of church and state.
* Public funds should go to public schools, not private schools. A key part of disestablishment in America was to no longer use tax dollars to support religious institutions.
* Sectarian religion should not be forced in school, such as the required posting 10 Commandments in classrooms, or required prayers.
* Repealing the Johnson amendment removes safeguards that protect houses of worship from partisan politicking and preserves their spiritual purpose.

The Christian's commitment to religious liberty should be guided by God's character of love, his respect for human choice and free will, and the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12). I pray that God grants you discernment to understand the legacy of religious freedom in America and the courage to defend the eternal principles so important to us.

Thank you for receiving my feedback!

Sincerely,

Chad Mejeur

From: Donald Wong <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] My Personal belief
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:38:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Department of Justice and the President's Religious Liberty Commission:

As a committed Christian who believes the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, I write because I deeply value both religious liberty and the constitutional principles that have protected it throughout our nation's history. It is precisely because of my faith - not in spite of it - that I believe the separation of church and state remains one of the greatest safeguards of both religious freedom and the integrity of the Christian church.

Contrary to the misconception, the separation of church and state is not hostile to Christianity. Rather, it protects the church from becoming dependent upon government power and shields the government from becoming an instrument of religious coercion. Whenever the church seeks to accomplish its mission through the authority of the state, both institutions are diminished. The church risks exchanging its moral and spiritual authority for political influence, while the state is tempted to elevate one faith tradition above another.

Scripture teaches that matters of conscience belong to God alone. Genuine faith cannot be legislated, compelled, or sustained through political power. Christ Himself established an important distinction when He declared, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). Civil government has a God-ordained responsibility to preserve justice and protect the rights of its citizens, but it was never intended to serve as the enforcement arm of religious belief or to empower one religious majority over another.

For this reason, I respectfully object to any recommendation that characterizes the separation of church and state as a constitutional mistake rather than one of the foundational principles that has preserved religious liberty in America. The two religion clauses of the First Amendment - the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause - were designed to work together. One protects the freedom to practice one's faith, while the other prevents government from establishing, promoting, or favoring one religion over another. Together they form one of the strongest protections of religious liberty ever established by any nation.

I would also encourage great caution regarding proposals to weaken the Johnson Amendment. Houses of worship fulfill their highest calling when they proclaim truth, disciple believers, and minister to their communities without becoming extensions of political campaigns or partisan organizations. The mission of the church is most effective when its allegiance remains first and foremost to Christ rather than to political parties or candidates.

History repeatedly demonstrates the wisdom of these constitutional safeguards. Religious persecution in America has seldom arisen from secularism alone; more often it has occurred when one religious group gained the support of civil authority and used governmental power to suppress the convictions of others. Baptists, Quakers, Catholics, Jews, Seventh-day Adventists, and many others have experienced discrimination when government aligned itself with particular religious interests. Our Founders wisely sought to prevent such abuses by limiting the power of government in matters of religion, thereby protecting believers of every faith as well as those of no faith.

As a Christian, I do not view the separation of church and state as a threat to the gospel. I regard it as one of the essential protections that preserves the purity of the church, safeguards the sacred right of conscience, and secures the religious liberty guaranteed to every American. My prayer is that these constitutional principles will continue to be upheld, ensuring that faith remains a matter of conviction rather than compulsion, and that both church and state remain faithful to their distinct and God-given purposes.

Respectfully submitted,

From: Ken Williams <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: keeping Church & State Separate
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:39:44 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:
I understand the Commission's concern about the Left's extreem positions. I only ask that the Commission also be very careful not to go too far on the Right either. History is a lesson book warning us not to go too far to the Left or to the Right. Didn't our American ancesters escape from their homeland in Euope that went too far to the Right and thus came to America to have to have religious freedom of choice for all religions. I'm concerned, as a pround American, that we be very careful that we not open the way for a repeat performance. You are corrrect that the separation of Church and State is not in the Constitution, but the principles are there. As a Christian Citizen of faith in Jesus Christ, I hold onto the First Amendment so that all religions can have the liberity of concscious and not fear that one group is favored or heard over the others. The Johnson Amemdment was enacted for that reason to restrait one church's politicing their Christian agenda through the government. Please be wise and fair in keeping the princples of Church and State separate. I'm for helping them both be free.

Sincerely, Ken Williams, Oregon

From: Brent Holm <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:42:02 -0400
Importance: Normal

I firmly support the continued separation of church and state. The government should stay out of religion. And religion should stay out of politics.

Brent Holm

From: Abede Tesfa <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:43:17 -0400
Importance: Normal

This brief letter is addressed to the distinguished members of the Religious Liberty Commission. I appreciate your openness to receiving feedback concerning this important topic as I imagine your time and attention are required in several different matters. As such, I will make my comments brief: maintaining clear and distinct boundaries between the state and the church is imperative in keeping this great nation from descending into oppression and eventually, inevitably, persecution.

While this nation is proudly made up of many Christian citizens, to declare it to be a Christian nation will bring results no different from a nation declaring itself to be officially Muslim, Hindu or any other religion. Not because biblical Christianity is on par with other religions; it is not. Biblical Christianity is the true religion, but the human heart, left to its own devices, is not able to discern the evil results of even the best intentions (Jeremiah 17:9). A church/state Union will have to, by its very nature, be punitive towards those who do not agree with or uphold the state sanctioned religious practice. This is not the way of Jesus. Jesus Himself made clear distinction between man's duty to God and his duty to Caesar (the state). If we deny this distinction, we will, as a nation, be going somewhere Jesus neither sanctioned nor intended. We will open the way for the working of a different spirit altogether.

I pray the Lord will guide you to see the blessing that a clear separation of church and state has been to this nation. And, as this principle is upheld, may we continue to enjoy God's smile upon this land.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

"Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him.... The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son." - Steps to Christ, 100 (1892)

From: Janice Cleary <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Letter to Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:44:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

I earnestly urge you to reject the draft report's recommendation to weaken the separation of church and state. America's foundational strength lies in its government remaining strictly neutral toward religion, neither promoting nor prohibiting the free exercise of faith.

History repeatedly demonstrates that whenever civil authority aligns with a religious majority, freedom of conscience is endangered, and minorities suffer. As a seventh-day Sabbath keeper, I write from the perspective of a religious minority whose spiritual ancestors faced discrimination, imprisonment, and persecution when the state enforced popular religious observances. Our Founders recognized these dangers and wisely adopted the First Amendment to prevent them.

The mission of the state is to preserve civil order and protect equal rights under the law. The mission of the church is to call people to voluntary faith through persuasion, not coercion. These institutions are strongest and remain uncorrupted when they operate within their proper spheres.

I respectfully ask the Commission to recommend policies that reinforce constitutional barriers separating civil government from ecclesiastical authority, preserving an America where every citizen is free to follow their conscience without government interference.

Sincerely,

Janice E. Cleary
Michigan

From: Gregory Leavitt <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Keep Separation of Church & State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:45:34 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Separation of church and state protects freedom. Mixing religion and government lets the state impose one faith on everyone, leading to discrimination and tyranny.

Religion is personal. Government must stay neutral to protect everyone's right to believe without interference. History proves religious states oppress.

It was exactly why the USA was founded originally! The first people came here exactly BECAUSE church and state in their own countries were NOT separate.

So PLEASE, keep church and state completely separate.

Thank you,

Greg Leavitt
[redacted]

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." I John 4:9

From: Ruben Olm <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTe- Establishment Clause – Ruben Olm
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:46:19 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a Christian and a citizen of Wildwood, Georgia, to urge that whatever this Commission recommends keep government entirely out of the domain of religion. My case rests on Christian teaching itself before it rests on any secular argument. Christ divided all human duty into two jurisdictions when he said that we are to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's. Civil government was given charge of one jurisdiction only: the duties men owe one another. It was never given the other. As Jones told a Senate committee weighing a national Sunday law in 1888, there is a limit to the lawmaking power, and that limit is the line Christ himself drew. The test that follows is simple and religiously neutral: the state may ask only whether an act is civil or uncivil, never whether it is religious or irreligious. Any recommendation that puts government behind a religious text, display, or lesson crosses that line, and the objection is not that such a measure is too religious for a secular state but that it is forbidden by the very faith it claims to serve.

Second, rights that depend on majority approval are not rights at all but permissions, revocable whenever the majority's mood changes. Our constitutional tradition holds instead that rights are inherent, and that popular government exists above all to protect the minority, since the majority can always look after itself at the ballot box. When told that most Americans wanted Sunday legislation, Jones answered that the people, however numerous, have no right to invade another person's relationship to God. Congress's own 1829-1830 committee report said the conscience of a solitary Jew is as sacred, under the Constitution, as that of an entire Christian community. Popular support can justify a highway bill. It cannot justify a religious one, because religion was never among the matters submitted to the vote.

Third, and most fundamentally, government could never have received authority over religion, because no person can delegate it. I can authorize another to manage my property; I cannot authorize anyone to believe or worship in my place. Since our government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed, and religious power is not a power any person can consent to give, religion was excluded from government's jurisdiction from the very founding, before any amendment was written. The First Amendment did not create this exclusion; it only recorded what the Declaration of Independence had already made true.

Finally, even a law that favors religion destroys free exercise, because it concedes that religion is a fit subject for legislation at all, and majorities change. Any such law must define the faith it favors, which means some believers are included and others excluded, and even the included now practice their religion by legislative permission rather than by right. Jones warned that no man can safely consent to law favoring his own creed, since he thereby surrenders his liberty to follow his conscience if it should lead him elsewhere later. Believers who welcome state sponsorship today are handing a tool to whatever administration governs tomorrow.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Ruben Olm
Wildwood, GA

Sent from my iPhone

From: Carol gardner <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Cheri G
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:46:23 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing as both a citizen and a person of faith to express concern about recommendations that would weaken the historic separation of church and state, including proposals that encourage greater government funding of religious activities and increased partisan political involvement by churches.

I love my country, and I love my God. The freedoms we enjoy today—including both religious liberty and self-government—have come at an immense cost through the sacrifices of countless generations. Because of that, I believe we have a responsibility to do everything within our power to preserve and protect those freedoms for future generations.

The Commission's suggestion that separation should give way to a closer partnership between church and state troubles me. The principle of church–state separation was not created to restrain faith; rather, it was established to protect it. Clear boundaries between religious institutions and government help ensure that churches remain free to follow their convictions without political interference and that government remains accountable to all citizens equally.

When government and religious organizations become too closely connected, both can be compromised. Government funding often brings oversight, expectations, and political pressures. Churches may find themselves competing for public dollars, seeking favor from elected officials, or becoming entangled in partisan conflicts. Over time, their focus can shift from their spiritual mission toward political and financial interests.

History shows that when church and state become intertwined, the results rarely strengthen either institution. Separation is not a threat to faith; it is a safeguard for faith. It allows religious communities to flourish because their authority comes from their beliefs and mission, not from government support or political influence.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to reconsider recommendations that blur the line between church and state. Preserving that separation is one of the best ways to protect both religious liberty and democratic freedom. It keeps churches free to answer to God rather than politicians, and it helps ensure that government remains free from religious favoritism.

Thank you for considering my perspective and my sincere desire to preserve the freedoms that make our nation strong.

Sincerely,

Cheri G

A Smile is Worth a Thousand Words! E

From: Colby Wiltse <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report (Colby Wiltse)
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:47:02 -0400
Importance: Normal

Chairman Patrick, Vice Chairman Carson, and Distinguished Members of the Commission:

Thank you to the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission for undertaking this historic effort to examine the state of religious liberty in America and for inviting the public to help shape its final recommendations. The opportunity for citizens to participate in this process reflects the very freedoms the Commission seeks to protect.

Religious liberty is not simply one constitutional right among many; it is America's first freedom and a cornerstone of our constitutional republic. When individuals are free to live according to their sincerely held beliefs without government coercion or discrimination, our communities, our institutions, and our nation are stronger.

As the CEO of Citizens Defending Freedom, I have had the privilege of working alongside pastors, parents, educators, and community leaders across the country. Our organization regularly helps citizens navigate issues involving religious liberty, parental rights, and constitutional freedoms at the local level. One consistent theme has emerged through this work: many conflicts surrounding religious liberty do not begin with hostility toward faith, but with a misunderstanding of what the First Amendment actually protects. Many public officials, educators, and even citizens have been taught that the Constitution requires religion to be excluded from the public square. That misunderstanding creates unnecessary conflict and often discourages people of faith from fully participating in civic life.

For that reason, I strongly support the Commission's recommendation that the Department of Justice issue clear guidance regarding the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause. The Constitution protects Americans from government establishing religion, but it also protects the free exercise of religion. These principles are complementary, not contradictory. Clear federal guidance would help public officials correctly apply constitutional protections, reduce unnecessary disputes, and better safeguard the rights of Americans of every faith.

I also strongly support the Commission's recommendation to expand public education through practical "Know Your Rights" resources and educational initiatives. Throughout our work, we have found that many Americans simply do not know the protections they already possess under the Constitution. When citizens understand their rights, and when government officials understand their responsibilities, conflicts can often be resolved before they escalate into costly litigation. Education empowers both citizens and public servants to work together while respecting constitutional freedoms.

Religious liberty is not solely a benefit for people of faith; it is a safeguard for every American. It protects the freedom of every individual to live according to conscience while preserving the diversity of beliefs that have long strengthened our nation. Throughout American history, religious liberty has fostered charitable service, strengthened families, inspired civic engagement, and contributed immeasurably to the common good. Preserving these freedoms will require continued vigilance, constitutional literacy, and leaders who are willing to uphold both the letter and the spirit of the First Amendment.

Thank you for your leadership, for the considerable work reflected in this report, and for providing the American people with the opportunity to contribute to this important process. I encourage the Commission to continue advancing recommendations that educate both citizens and public officials, ensuring that religious liberty remains protected for future generations.

In Faith,

Colby Wiltse
Chief Executive Officer
PII | PII

Red text on a black background Description automatically generated

From: Roseanne Mullings <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT– Establishment Clause – Roseanne Mullings
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:47:36 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a Christian and a resident of Georgia who believes that If something is truly good, it proves itself in the lives of those who claim to believe it. When we reach for the force of law to prop up faith, we are quietly admitting that we doubt the power of the truth we claim to carry. There are other institutions that God himself has created to support and protect the faith.

My own conviction is simple: our job is to lift Christ up, and his is to draw people to himself. I believe God is able to do take care of his responsibilities better than any man or organization or earthly government

That conviction is also, I think, sound constitutional reasoning. The two religion clauses are not really two principles in tension but one principle seen from both sides. Any law touching religion, even one written by people who share my beliefs, has to define which religion or observance qualifies for its protection, and that definition necessarily excludes someone. Worse, it puts even the favored believers on notice that they hold their liberty by permission of the legislature rather than by right. A law that establishes my convictions today is a precedent that hands the same machinery to whoever holds power tomorrow, and majorities do not stay put. Religious liberty has to include the freedom to keep searching, to change one's mind if persuaded by Scripture or conscience, and a citizen who locks his present creed into statute has effectively legislated against his own future conscience.

History also teaches that coercion cannot produce what it is meant to produce. Forcing people into pews or off their fields on a designated day does not make Christians; it can only make hypocrites, since love toward God is the very substance of the duty being commanded, and love cannot be legislated. The historical record of state-sponsored Christianity over many centuries shows the same pattern of clerical pride, popular ignorance, and eventual persecution. A church propped up by civil power tends to attract converts of convenience and grow spiritually complacent, trading the power it was given for the power of the police. Any faith worth professing should be worth professing without state assistance, and if it is not, the state's support will not save it.

Finally, this is not a hypothetical danger. Sincere, devout people in Salem convinced themselves they were serving God while doing violence to their neighbors, and history judged their intentions kindly and their actions harshly. Less than a century ago, Tennessee farmers who worshiped on Saturday and quietly worked their own fields on Sunday were jailed and marched in chain gangs, while trainloads of laborers passed by unbothered every week. The lesson is not that those officials were unusually wicked; it is that once religious legislation is built, it will be used, and the people at the margins pay the price. The question before this Commission is not whether today's advocates for religious legislation are sincere. Salem's judges were sincere too. The question is what the machinery does once it exists, and who inherits the controls.
There is nothing new under the Sun and history is there for us to learn from it and avoid its mistakes for the sake of the future of our loved ones

To protect free exercise for all is the role of the state in this matter. I believe it will be a shame to fail to do the one thing actually required. I pray that if you are a believer, you will truly ask God what is it he requires of you to do; why He has allowed to be in that position. The people of America needs you to be a Daniel and a Joseph in contrast to a Samson

Respectfully,
Roseanne Mullings
Georgia

From: John Racealao<[redacted]>
To: [redacted], JohnRacealao<[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of State and Church
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:47:49 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Leaders,

I am against removing State and Church separation. You may have good intentions but this can easily turn against Christians in future.
My new book that is coming out soon, and is about being persecuted in Communist Romania and that took place exactly because there was no separation of Church and State.

Here is the Introduction of my book:
Have you ever wondered what it truly means to live in a country where faith and hope is a dangerous act? My journey through communist Romania offers a glimpse into a world where every day was a test of courage and conviction.

In a place where the government tightly controlled every aspect of life, even owning a Bible was considered a crime. I learned this firsthand when I was sentenced to 5.5 years in prison for smuggling Bibles in communist Romania, (Bibles sent from the United States) - an act of defiance that changed my life forever. The decision to risk everything for the freedom to believe wasn't easy, but it was necessary.

Prison in Romania wasn't just about confinement; it was about breaking the spirit. The days were long, the food scarce, and the fear constant. Yet, even in those harsh conditions, I was blessed to be among those who refused to let go of their faith. We found ways to encourage each other, sharing whispered prayers and sticking together.

Why share this story now? Because the lessons learned in those dark days still matter. They remind us that freedom—of thought, of faith, of expression, is precious and must be protected. If you're interested in learning more about this story and how it shapes our understanding of freedom today, I invite you to read the story from the one who lived through it.

I encourage you to continue the conversation with others and keep these important lessons alive.

I also understand that you have good intentions, but Future Government politicians can easily turn your good intentions against us. I do not want that to happen in America.

Thank You!

John Raceala

Religious Liberty Ministry Leader in my Church.

From: Karen Bosch <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] COMMENT on Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:48:12 -0400
Importance: Normal

One of the things that has always separated us as Americans is the inalienable rights endowed upon us by our Creator, as found in our Declaration of Independence. The protection of individual rights is the key to our freedoms which are to be protected and upheld.

While the phrase "separation of church and state" is not found in the Constitution, our founding fathers clearly believed that we as individuals have the right to decide which, if any religion we choose to practice. This is what many call liberty of conscience. Nowhere does it indicate that our government can or should decide this for us. As a Christian, I believe the God whom I worship, gives everyone the right to choose whether to worship Him or not.

Therefore, I believe it is imperative to keep the concept of separation of church and state as a part of our framework of government. I encourage the members of this committee, along with all three branches of our government NOT to build a bridge between church and state.

I pray for our government and its leaders daily. Thank you for your serious consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Karen S. Bosch

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:50:34 -0400
Importance: Normal

In regards to the issue of the separation of church and state:

I am aware of the effort at the present time to eradicate the wall of separation between church and state. I am also aware of the reasoning behind the establishment of the wall in the first place, to ensure that American citizens have the inalienable right to believe as they choose and to worship whatever god they choose with no input nor assistance from the government in any form whatsoever. It is a basic human right for a person to be guided by the dictates of his/her conscience, and so I oppose any and all efforts by the government to impinge upon such a fundamental right as to believe or not to believe in God, or for the government to establish a religion irrespective of individual convictions.

Respectfully,

William R. Whicker

From: Yamian Peguero <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Yamian Peguero
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:50:59 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a Christion, I am concerned by the apparent push to blur the distinction between religion and government. While I believe the state has a vital responsibility to protect the free exercise of religion for every individual, granting religious organizations greater influence over government is not the way to achieve that goal and may ultimately undermine it.

History repeatedly shows that when religious and political power become intertwined, both institutions are more susceptible to corruption, and the rights and freedoms of those with differing beliefs are more likely to be diminished.

I respectfully urge the Commission to uphold a clear separation between church and state as the best safeguard for religious liberty, equal treatment under the law, and the freedom of all Americans.

Sincerely,

Yamian Peguero
God bless!

From: DJ Stichte[redacted]
To: "RLC (OASG)" [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTe- Establishment Clause – Delores Sticht
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:51:36 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen who believes deeply in both halves of the First Amendment's promise on religion, and I ask you to hold that belief in mind as you weigh proposals to expand government's role in religious matters.

Start with a simple fact about how our government came to exist. It rests on consent — on powers the people delegated to it. But no person can delegate his relationship to God to anyone else. I can authorize a neighbor to manage my property; I cannot authorize him to believe for me or to answer for my soul. Since that power was never mine to give, it was never the government's to receive. This is not a technicality of the Establishment Clause; it is a fact about what "consent of the governed" can and cannot cover. No government will ever stand before the judgment seat to answer for an individual's faith, and a power that carries no accountability was never rightly held. So when someone tells this Commission that the Constitution only forbids a national church and permits everything short of it, the answer is that the exclusion of religion from government's business runs deeper than any clause — the clause only recorded what was already true.

I would also ask you to consider what happens even when a religious law favors the majority's own faith. Any law on the subject of religion must define the religion it favors, and any definition draws a line that includes some believers and excludes others — and even the included no longer practice freely, but by permission, on terms a future legislature can change. A believer who welcomes government backing for his own creed is trading away his liberty to be persuaded otherwise, should Scripture or conscience ever lead him elsewhere. That is a strange bargain for people who claim to prize religious liberty, and it is why I would object to a law establishing my own church's practices as readily as one establishing anyone else's. The danger is the legislating, not who currently holds the pen.

There is also the plain problem of whose religion any such measure would actually enshrine. There is no generic, agreed-upon Christianity sitting ready for government adoption. Even the Ten Commandments are not neutral ground — Protestants and Catholics have long numbered and translated them differently, and hundreds of bodies claim the Bible as their foundation. The moment an office of government picks a translation, a numbering, or a set of "principles" to post or teach, it has settled a live theological dispute by political power. That is not heritage; it is a legislature acting as a church council, which even a congressional committee recognized as far outside its proper, purely political purpose.

Finally, I would ask the Commission not to treat strict separation as some later invention layered onto an indifferent Constitution. It was deliberate design, pressed for by churches themselves — Baptists, Presbyterians, Quakers — who had felt establishment weigh on them from underneath. Madison told the Virginia ratifying convention there was not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion. The founders did not wait for full establishment to object; they resisted the principle at its very first appearance. A commission that wishes to move government back into religious sponsorship carries the burden of explaining away Madison in Madison's own words.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Delores Sticht

From: patricia erhard <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:51:39 -0400
Importance: Normal

There should be a definite SEPARATION of church and state as our constitution first amendment gives us the freedom to choose our religion, or choose not to have a religion

I believe there should be NO BRIDGE between church and state

Patricia Erhard
Sent from my iPhone

From: Ria Chakrabarty <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION DRAFT REPORT – HINDUS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:52:05 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: HfHR_Comment_Letter_7.10.docx

Hello,

On behalf of Hindus for Human Rights, please see the attached public comment from our organization.

Thanks,

Ria Chakrabarty
Senior Policy Director | Hindus for Human Rights
[redacted]
Mobile/Signal/WhatsApp: [redacted]

July 13, 2026

Via Electronic Mail to [redacted]

Religious Liberty Commission
U.S. Department of Justice
Office of the Associate Attorney General
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

On behalf of Hindus for Human Rights ("HfHR"), I write to provide comments on the draft Religious Liberty Commission report. HfHR is a U.S.-based advocacy organization that speaks from a Hindu perspective in defense of pluralism, civil rights, and human rights, rooted in the values of *shanti* (peace), *nyaya* (justice), and *satya* (truth). We work to build a Hindu voice of resistance to religious nationalism, caste discrimination, and all forms of bigotry, in the United States and abroad, and we understand better than most the damage done when a government aligns itself with one favored version of religion at the expense of everyone else.

As a threshold matter, HfHR must first register its serious concerns about the legitimacy of the process that produced this draft. The Commission was established, and has operated, in a manner that raises significant questions under the Federal Advisory Committee Act ("FACA"). FACA requires that advisory committees be fairly balanced in the points of view represented and the functions performed, and that the public be afforded timely access to materials prepared for and by the committee. The Commission's membership and the roster of witnesses called at its hearings did not reflect that balance, nor did the Commission comply with its transparency obligations. The Commission consistently privileged a single worldview: that the United States was founded as, and should remain, a Judeo-Christian nation, and that the government should promote one favored religious viewpoint, while sidelining the perspectives of religious minorities, women, and LGBTQ+ Americans. HfHR is not alone in raising these concerns; we previously joined a multifaith lawsuit challenging the Commission's formation and operation on precisely these grounds. This underlying bias, and the Commission's failure to meet its transparency obligations, meant that HfHR and other interested members of the public could not meaningfully participate in or influence the Commission's work.

Compounding this problem, the Commission has now given the public only fifteen days — a window that coincided with the Fourth of July holiday — to review a 224-page draft report and submit comments. A comment period of this length, scheduled over a major national holiday, is not consistent with a genuine effort to solicit and incorporate public feedback. It is, instead,

consistent with a process designed to move a predetermined document toward finalization with only the appearance of public input.

The substance of the draft report bears out these procedural concerns and stands in stark opposition to the values of HfHR. In particular, HfHR is concerned about the following elements of the report:

- The draft report asserts that the separation of church and state is a legally baseless myth that should be opposed, and elsewhere celebrates the erosion of what it calls "walls of separation" between government and religion. HfHR knows firsthand, from our work opposing Hindutva — the Hindu nationalist movement that has fused religious and state power in India to the detriment of religious minorities, Dalits, and dissenting Hindus alike — that governments that formally favor one religious tradition inevitably diminish the freedom of everyone else. The same dynamic threatens Hindu Americans, along with people of all faiths and none, here in the United States. Church-state separation is not a myth; it is a core protection that allows religious pluralism to survive.

- The draft report calls for public schools to promote religion, including through school prayer and the display of the Ten Commandments, without meaningfully grappling with the effect of such policies on students who do not share the majority faith. The report does not consider, for example, that a Hindu student may feel pressured to participate in a teacher- or coach-led Christian prayer, or that the Ten Commandments reflect neither Hindu teachings nor Hindu tradition. A Commission genuinely committed to "religious liberty for all Americans" cannot recommend policies that make religious minority students strangers in their own classrooms.

- The draft report devotes an entire chapter to combating anti-Semitism, which is necessary and appropriate, but affords no comparable attention to Islamophobia and the discrimination and violence faced by Hindu Americans and other religious minorities, including vandalism of temples and hate incidents targeting Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, as well as other South Asian Americans who are often targeted based on misperceptions about their faith. These omissions are especially striking given the current climate of rising bigotry and Islamophobia against South Asian and Hindu communities, and they are predictable in light of a process that excluded the very communities whose experiences would have surfaced these issues.

- The draft report repeatedly dismisses "secular neutrality" as a myth and instead calls for the government to actively "celebrate" and promote religion in public life. HfHR takes no issue with religion having a vibrant place in American civic life, and we ourselves speak publicly from our faith. But there is a critical difference between a government that makes room for many faiths and one that anoints a favored civic

religion. The latter is the same majoritarian logic that HfHR opposes when it takes the form of Hindutva abroad, and it is no less dangerous when it takes the form of Christian nationalism at home.

Overall, the Commission's bias, and its refusal to seriously engage with other viewpoints, have produced a one-sided and deeply flawed draft report. If published, this report will lend the imprimatur of the federal government to positions that threaten the religious freedom of Hindu Americans and countless other religious minorities.

Ultimately, the Commission's demonstrated bias and its FACA-deficient process, combined with a public comment period that was both far too short and timed around a national holiday, mean that it would be impossible at this stage for the Commission to meaningfully redress the many flaws in this draft report through the current comment process. Hindus for Human Rights therefore urges the Commission to withdraw the draft report, and to restart its work, if it continues at all, through a process that complies with FACA's fair balance and transparency requirements and genuinely reflects the pluralism the Commission claims to strive for.

Sincerely,

Sunita Viswanath
Executive Director
Hindus for Human Rights

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:53:54 -0400
Importance: Normal

Separation of church and State

Paul jasovsky
Dear members of the Religious liberty commission:
I am against the bridge you are planning to do to join church and State.
Our country has enjoyed freedom for 250 years because of that separation.
I am 75 years old now and I sent my children to Christian school many years ago and I paid for it and they received a Christian education that was not influenced by the state.
History has shown us that when church and State joins persecution follows, and that is evident by what happened during the dark ages in Europe, when people were persecuted and burned at the stake for not going along with the church state religion of Rome.
Please do not build that bridge, that's what protects the church and our freedom to worship far more than it restricts it. Please keep that wall.
Sincerely,
Paul jasovsky
Albany, Ohio

From: Tim Mackall <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Cc: Katy Roberts <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report - Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:55:17 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: PUBLIC_COMMENT_-_Draft_Report_of_the_Religious_Liberty_Commission_-_ERLC.pdf

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In this email, you will find the public comments of The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention in response to the draft report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission published on June 26, 2026.

Please reach out if we can be of further assistance.

Best,
Tim Mackall
Policy Associate
Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission
[redacted] | [redacted] (Cell)

THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

July 13, 2026

Electronically Submitted

Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

RE: Comments on June 2026 Proposed Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

Dear Sir or Madam:

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) respectfully submits the following comments in response to the Proposed Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission published on June 26, 2026.

I write to you as President of the ERLC, the ethics entity of the SBC. The SBC is the nation's largest protestant denomination with nearly 13 million members in over 45,000 churches. We are charged by the SBC with addressing public policy issues such as religious liberty, marriage and family, the sanctity of human life, the respect of human dignity, and Christian ethics.

Since the creation of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission by Executive Order 14291 on May 1, 2025, the ERLC has been encouraged by the purpose and intent of the Commission.[1] The inquisitive objective of the Commission through hosting hearings and creating recommendations for departments and agencies demonstrates a commitment to ensuring the retention and protection of the American value of religious liberty.

Our government's protection of and posture toward religious liberty is a direct representation of our citizenry's perspective on freedom of thought and action. Without robust protections for religious liberty, our nation abandons an essential freedom tied to America's founding.

During the 2026 Annual Meeting of the SBC, Southern Baptists overwhelmingly passed a resolution commemorating the 250th anniversary of the United States, specifically honoring

[1] 90 Fed. Reg. 19417 (May 1, 2025).

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Baptist contributions to religious liberty.[2] Through this resolution, our churches celebrated and reflected on America's history, religious liberty, and the Baptist influence in authoring and passing the First Amendment. We also reaffirmed our country's need for continued protections of religious liberty for all people, because this freedom is our God-given right grounded in the dignity of all people created in the image of God.

Through the following comments, the ERLC commends and supports many of the recommendations included in the June 2026 Proposed Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, while offering a distinctly Baptist perspective of religious liberty. Among our conclusions below, we believe that safeguarding religious liberty requires more than defending legal rights after they have been violated. It requires cultivating a culture that understands why those rights exist in the first place.

Chapter 1: Religion as an Indispensable Support

At the start of the report, the Commission rightly endeavored to define religious liberty on page 34, offering that religious liberty is "understood as the proper allocation of authority between religion … and government power." While a proper "allocation" of authority between religious and government power is an important outcome to religious liberty, the ERLC disagrees with the characterization of religious liberty being allocated.

At our nation's founding 250 years ago, the framers conceived a radical idea: Our rights are unalienable, endowed by our Creator, not apportioned or granted to us by some civil power. We are not allocated our liberties. We exercise them freely because our government rightly acknowledges it has no place in the sphere of religion to restrict man's access to God or impose penalties for worship.

Religious liberty is recognizing that one's belief and faith is a God-given right grounded in the dignity of every human being made in the image of God. Religious liberty has no consideration for an allocation of influence or permission by a government, as no government has the right or authority to alter, supplant, or limit what God has bestowed upon his creation.

[2] "On the 250th Anniversary of the United States and the Baptist Contribution to Religious Liberty." SBC.net. Accessed July 10, 2026. https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-the-250th-anniversary-of-the-united-states-and-the-baptist-contribution-to-religious-liberty/.

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As Article XVII on religious liberty in the *Baptist Faith & Message* expresses, "A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power."[3] The idea that any civil power or some other authority beside God Almighty can allocate our liberties is contrary to a historic American understanding of religious liberty.

As the American Baptist John Leland wrote,

> "Every man must give an account of himself to God, and therefore every man ought to be at liberty to serve God in that way that he can best reconcile it to his conscience. If government can answer for individuals at the day of judgment, let men be controlled by it in religious matters; otherwise let men be free."[4]

Therefore, the ERLC asks the Commission to amend its definition of religious liberty on page 34 to reflect our God-given freedom to exercise religion, which is then recognized and not infringed upon by the government. The ERLC asserts that this change is necessary to avoid the perilous implications of articulating that religious liberty is something to be allocated by the State.

Chapter 2: Religious Liberty and the American Story

The ERLC was encouraged to see the proposed report recount the integral nature of religious liberty at the American founding, consider its development throughout American history, and reflect on its necessity today.

The Baptist influence on James Madison and the Bill of Rights is engrained in our national history. Baptist preacher John Leland worked closely with Madison to ensure that religious liberty was included in the Bill of Rights, eventually becoming our first freedom. Further, the influence of Baptist minister Isaac Backus in advocating against a state-mandated religion was instrumental to our balance of the Christian ideal: a free Church in a free state.

Southern Baptists know that religious liberty is not just a political principle like the "wall of separation," but a biblical conviction born out of our belief in individual soul liberty–the idea

[3] Southern Baptist Convention, *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville, TN: Southern Baptist Convention, 2000), under "Article XVII: Religious Liberty," https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#xvii.
[4] John Leland, *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable* (1791).

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that each person is directly accountable to God and must have the freedom to make their own religious choices without coercion from the state or other religious authorities.

While mainstream American culture often fails to understand what Thomas Jefferson meant by the wall of separation in his letter to the Danbury Baptists, we rightly understand that this wall, the First Amendment, serves to keep the government out of the Church by preventing a state established religion. It does not serve to keep the Church from participating in government through active involvement in the public square. Any assertion otherwise undermines the integrity of the First Amendment's promise of free exercise of religion.

Chapter 3: Faith-Based Institutions and the Enduring Fight for Religious Identity, Mission, and Integrity

People of faith often stand in the gap of where the government does not, cannot, or should not go, addressing the primary needs of their communities. Motivated by being the hands and the feet of Christ, Southern Baptist efforts in pregnancy resource centers, adoption and foster care agencies, and disaster relief programs demonstrate our commitment to serving the vulnerable and marginalized as we carry out the Great Commission.

The ERLC was encouraged by many of the recommendations highlighted in this chapter, especially the call to address concerning trends of discriminating against faith-based foster care providers and parents.

Under the Biden administration, the ERLC filed comments opposing a rule from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that deemed faith-based foster care agencies and religious foster parents as unsafe and improper for LGBTQ-identifying children.[5] In these comments, the ERLC expressed that, "The proposed rule will lead to religious discrimination of otherwise qualified foster families and will result in a catastrophic lack of foster care placements for the vulnerable children who need them most." Southern Baptists explicitly spoke in support of adoption and foster care in a 2022 resolution, resolving "to continue and increase their efforts to

[5] ERLC. *Public Comments - HHS - Safe and Appropriate Foster Care Placement Requirements for Titles IV-E and IV-B* (November 27, 2023), https://erlc.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Public-Comments-HHS-Safe-and-Appropriate-Foster-Care-Placement-Requirements-for-Titles-IV-E-and-IV-B.pdf

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serve and support … foster-care and adoptive families, doing invaluable and often under-recognized work in the care of women and children at every stage of life." [6]

The ERLC is thankful that HHS has initiated the process to remove the discriminatory and harmful Biden-era rule from the federal regulatory code.[7] Furthermore, the ERLC appreciates the recommendation from the Commission to issue a new rule that ensures religious agencies and families are not discriminated against in Title IV-E and Title IV-B programs.

Whether it is accessing religious education, preserving church autonomy, or ensuring compliance with the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), the ERLC is grateful to see recommendations that uphold the integrity of religious liberty in America that allow ministries and people of faith to remain on mission in service and worship of Christ.

Chapter 5: The Fight for Faith on College Campuses

The ERLC is grateful for the Commission's recognition of the contested and tumultuous atmosphere on college campuses which can leave young people of faith in fear of living out and expressing their beliefs. It is even more discouraging when such an atmosphere is condoned, facilitated, and perpetuated by university leadership.

The Commission rightly recommends the expansion of the Equal Access Act. In conjunction, the ERLC recommends the expansion of such a recommendation to support the passing of the Equal Campus Access Act, which would prevent funds given under the Higher Education Act from going to schools that discriminate against religious student groups by denying them access to facilities and resources otherwise available to them. The potential cohesive reach of these two distinct pieces of federal legislation have the potential to jointly expand religious liberty protections on primary and secondary education and college campuses across the country.

On June 18, 2026, the ERLC sent a letter to Chairman Wahlberg and Ranking Member Scott on the Committee on Education and the Workforce, encouraging the congressmen to schedule a

[6] "On Anticipation of a Historic Moment in the Pro-Life Movement." SBC.net. Accessed July 10, 2026. https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-anticipation-of-a-historic-moment-in-the-pro-life-movement/.
[7] ERLC. *Public Comments - HHS - Designated Placement Requirements Under Titles IV-E and IV-B for LGBTQI+ Children; Rescission.* (April 6, 2026), https://erlc.com/policy-content/protecting-religious-foster-families-erlc-urges-hhs-to-remove-unlawful-biden-era-rule/.

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markup for the Equal Campus Access Act.[8] In the letter, I shared my personal experience as a college educator and administrator, saying,

> "Faith-based student groups not only serve as avenues for fellowship with people of shared religious belief, but they also provide foundational learning and leadership development opportunities during a college student's formative years. As Southern Baptists, we specifically see these benefits through our Baptist Collegiate Ministries on campuses nationwide, which create a sense of community for students, form them in their faith, and facilitate the sharing of the good news of the gospel."

With the Commission's urging, Congress may take the necessary steps in passing the Equal Campus Access Act to safeguard religious student organizations against discrimination on college campuses, enabling students to live out and share their religious ideas and values.

Chapter 6: The Rights and Roles of Parents and Teachers

The abhorrent reality of state and local governments attempting to usurp the role of parents in the upbringing of their children and to remove religious Americans out of public life is no more prevalent than in public education. The effort to reestablish the rightful role of primary instructor of children back to parents has been marked by varied successes and distressing set-backs.

In June 2024, Southern Baptists passed a resolution "On the God-Given Rights and Responsibilities of Parents," recognizing that parents are instituted by God to be the primary stewards and educators of their children and encouraging states and local governments to come alongside parents to act in cohesion with familial units, giving rightful respect to parental roles and responsibilities.[9]

We come alongside the Commission in calling upon Congress to pass the Families' Rights and Responsibilities Act to protect the right of parents to "direct the upbringing, education, and health care of their children" by requiring the Supreme Court to review all parental rights cases involving the federal government under "strict scrutiny." We have seen encouraging progress on this front, witnessed in the 2025 Supreme Court decision in *Mahmoud v. Taylor*.[10]

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[8] ERLC, *ERLC Advocates for Equal Campus Access Act* (June 18, 2026), https://erlc.com/policy-content/erlc-advocates-for-equal-campus-access-act/
[9] "On the God-Given Rights and Responsibilities of Parents." SBC.net. Accessed July 10, 2026. https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-the-god-given-rights-and-responsibilities-of-parents/
[10] *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, 606 U.S. 522 (2025).

The ERLC is encouraged by the Commission's recommendations to investigate and litigate parental rights violations, support legislation that secures parental rights, and issue updated religious liberty guidance to public educators. In addition to the currently listed recommendations, the ERLC asks the Commission to recommend that the Department of Justice support litigation where the religious rights of parents and teachers have been violated by public school officials in the secret "gender transitions" of minor children.

Chapter 8: Religious Liberty for Religious Leaders

The Commission rightly recognizes the common concern of First Amendment protections not being applied consistently across the different roles that pastors and religious leaders occupy. Our pastors are accountable before God as teachers of the Word of God. This often requires them to communicate truthfully about issues that many non-believers find to be inherently political.

However, many pastors are required to tailor their speech to the confines of what the government and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) find permissible because of the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment permits the government to police speech from the pulpit, violating not only the free exercise and free speech clauses, but also the principles of church autonomy.

If pastors cannot speak to the culture, they abandon a key component of their ministry assignment, which is to shepherd their churches through the real moral and ethical issues in a fallen world and teach the whole counsel of God's Word.

The ERLC is grateful for the Commission's recognition of how federal legislation can improperly burden and restrict rightful speech. The SBC affirmatively states that if pastors and church leaders are unable to speak on issues of culture, they are forced to abandon a key component of their ministry assignment of addressing real and pressing moral and ethical issues that Christians face in a complex world.

The ERLC is also grateful for the report's inclusion of the Safeguarding Charity Act, which would protect nonprofits and religious organizations by making clear that their tax-exempt status is not equivalent to accepting "federal financial assistance" and, therefore, ensuring they are not subject to certain conditions attached to federal funding.[11] This bill would properly differentiate distinct entities and protect churches from improper and burdensome compliance mandates.

[11] ERLC, *Support the Safeguarding Charity Act* (2026). https://erlc.com/policy-center/support-the-safeguarding-charity-act/.

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Additionally, the ERLC encourages the Commission to recommend the Fair Treatment for Religious Organizations Act, a bill that would protect the tax-exempt status of religious organizations from predatory administrations targeting the religious organization's beliefs surrounding marriage, gender, and sexuality, even if those beliefs are inconsistent with the law.

Chapter 9: First Do No Harm – Religious Liberty in Healthcare

The tragic commonality of discrimination against and harassment of medical professionals in relation to their religious beliefs is disheartening and demeaning to those who endeavor to serve their communities with the gifts God has given them. Such behavior is contrary to First Amendment rights and hinders the services that religious medical professionals can provide to the public, which inextricably benefit their communities.

The ERLC comes alongside the Commission in urging Congress to pass both the Conscience Protection Act[12] and the Conscience Protections for Medical Residents Act.[13] Each of these legislative proposals would ensure that medical professionals are not coerced into violating their religious beliefs and would offer robust protections for those who abhor the realities of abortion and desire to honor the sanctity of human life.

Chapter 12: Faith Under Fire in America's Houses of Worship

Every Sunday, over 45,000 Southern Baptist congregations in North America gather to honor and praise the only one who is worthy, Jesus Christ. This sacred time of worship is critical for Christians, yet we have seen a disturbing rise in disruptions and attacks on houses of worship.

For many Southern Baptists, affronts against the sanctity of the gathered church became personal when protests disrupted a Sunday morning service at Cities Church, in St. Paul, Minnesota.[14] This event was a heartbreaking reminder of the brokenness of our world and of the unfortunate reality that some Americans are apathetic at best and hostile at worst to things of God.

The SBC has created various resources to aid churches in reflectively preparing church safety measures and mindfully implementing security protocols to best ensure the safety of congregants

[12] ERLC, *Support Conscience Protections* (2026). https://erlc.com/policy-center/support-conscience-protections/.
[13] ERLC, *ERLC Supports the Conscience Protections for Medical Residents Act* (November 21, 2025). https://erlc.com/policy-content/erlc-supports-the-conscience-protections-for-medical-residents-act/.
[14] ERLC, *ERLC Decries Disruption of Minnesota SBC Worship Service* (Jan. 18, 2026). https://erlc.com/press/erlc-decries-disruption-of-minnesota-sbc-worship-service/

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and guests.[15] It is a harsh reflection of the impact of sin on our world when churches and diverse places of worship have to consider such measures to ensure their right to peacefully worship. The ERLC is grateful for the Commission's recommendations to help protect places of worship.

Conclusion

In summary, the ERLC is pleased to see the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission thoughtfully engage with such weighty and significant issues which limit the flourishing of our society. The Commission's recommendations thoughtfully urge departments and agencies to consider how to bring their existing policies and rules into greater alignment with our nation's founding principle of religious liberty.

Many of these recommendations can be pursued through executive action by President Trump, while others can be implemented across federal agencies. The remainder require Congress to pass legislation. For this reason, we ask the Commission and President Trump not only to consider actions pertinent for the executive branch, but also to clearly communicate the legislative recommendations included in this report to Congress, so that we may see swift action taken to secure our most sacred right.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Respectfully submitted,

Evan Lenow, Ph.D
President
Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission
of the Southern Baptist Convention

[15] "Church Safety and Security." SBC.net. Accessed July 10, 2026. https://www.sbc.net/resources/resources-for-church-safety-and-security/.

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From: Larry Stapleton <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Larry Stapleton
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:58:07 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen who believes deeply in both religion clauses of the First Amendment, and I ask you to weigh three arguments before recommending any measure that would draw government further into the business of faith.

First, rights do not come from majorities, and religious liberty is not a permission that fifty-one percent of a legislature can grant or withdraw. If a vote could create this right, a vote could dissolve it, which means it was never a right at all. The American theory is the opposite: rights are inherent, government exists to protect them, and constitutions place them beyond the reach of election returns. As one old tract on the limits of civil authority put it, popular governments represent the will of the majority, but they are instituted to protect the rights of the minority — the individual. A majority hardly needs protecting; it can already win at the ballot box. The whole reason conscience is fenced off from politics is for the person who cannot win that vote. Whatever popularity official religious displays or instruction may currently enjoy, that popularity is not a warrant. Religion was never among the things submitted to the vote.

Second, I would ask the Commission to consider that even a law favoring religion destroys free exercise, because it concedes that religion is a proper subject for legislatures to define and regulate. Once granted, that concession does not stay in friendly hands forever — majorities shift. Any religious statute must draw lines around whose religion counts, and even those inside the line no longer practice freely; they practice by permission, on terms the next legislature can rewrite. There is something worth sitting with in the old warning that no man can safely consent to legislation favoring his own faith, because in doing so he resigns his right to change his mind later, should he become convinced some other view is nearer the truth. Believers who welcome government sponsorship today are handing a tool to every future officeholder, including those who do not share their convictions.

Third, and most importantly to me personally, coercion cannot produce faith. A law can compel a body into a pew; it cannot put belief in a heart. Forcing outward observance multiplies hypocrisy, not conversion. History bears this out over fifteen centuries of established Christianity in Europe, which produced, in Madison's accounting, pride and indolence in the clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, and in both, superstition and persecution. State sponsorship does not strengthen the favored church; it corrupts it, substituting the power of government for the power of conviction. General Grant said it plainly: leave religion to the family altar, the church, and private schools supported by private giving, and keep state and church forever separate. That counsel has aged well. The churches most eager for official favor today are, on the record, the ones with the most to lose.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Lastly, I would like to point out that the first clause is not clearly understood by almost everyone. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion". This text is NOT saying that Congress is prohibited in establishing a state religion. The word "respecting" is being used here in a similar way that the Bible uses it. God is not a respecter of persons. It does not mean "in reference to". It means "showing favortism toward compard to others".

Also, the word "establishment" is not being used here as a gerund which is the way it is normally read. It is being

used as a normal noun, such as in "this is a fine establishment you have here".

So it actually is telling us that Congress shall not be permitted to pass any law that would show favoritism toward one establishment of religion over all the rest.

Respectfully,
Larry Stapleton

From: David Heidel <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:59:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.

David Heidel

From: Mark OFfill <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:00:14 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern;

Please keep the separation between church and state. While not stated directly in the constitition it is a core principal bigger than any one amendment.

The pages of history, especially the Dark Ages, show us what can happen if the separation is eroded.

Please don't do that.

Mark OFfill
Bible teacher and chaplain

From: Nancy DeGrie <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Freedom
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:00:51 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Sirs,
America was founded on the principles of religious freedom. Freedom to choose to serve God or not. When church and state unite there's always persecution. Our first amendment says Congress will make no law establishing religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone
Get Outlook for Android

From: Daliah Weldsmckenzie <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT: PRESIDENTIAL RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:03:32 -0400
Importance: Normal

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Via EMAIL: [redacted]

RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the recommendations of the Religious Liberty Committee submitted to President Donald J. Trump on June 26, 2026. While we are mindful of the Committee's labors, which resulted in the 12 recommendations released June 26, certain of which we agree with, we write to voice our concerns and objections to the Committee's first and ninth recommendations [1] and its obviously insufficient consideration of the warnings of the Founding Fathers of the dangers of a union of church and state or the many lessons of history regarding same.

The Committee recommended that the Department of Justice "issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state." [2] At the formal release of the Committee's recommendations on the same day, Committee Chair Dan Patrick publicly stated that "the separation of church and state is not in the constitution" and that the phrase "has no constitutional basis." [3]

As citizens and students of history, and as Christians, we are alarmed lest the flawed and unconstitutional view of the Chair of the Committee of the so-called "proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the separation of church and state" prove influential or worse, instructive, to the Department of Justice. If the Committee's opinion of the so-called "proper understanding" of the Establishment Clause is the same as that of its Chair, it is apparent that its understanding is not proper, but rather improper.

Founding Father, "Father of the Constitution", and fourth President of the United States, James Madison, contradicted Chair Dan Patrick's claim that the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution. Madison stated that "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." According to James Madison, the separation of church and state is in the Constitution. As to whether James Madison, who is the principal author of the Establishment Clause, or Dan Patrick, is the greater authority on this subject, we think it not difficult for reasonably minded people to ascertain.
Certainly, the Founding Fathers were all aware of the persecution of the Baptists, Quakers, Jews, and others in some of the colonies. They had seen firsthand the ear croppings, whippings, imprisonment, and hangings in Massachusetts and other colonies.

In Europe, the persecution of the martyrs is well documented. Today we take the Bible for granted but forget that William Tyndale was executed for translating the Bible into the English language, not by atheists but by religious bigots. It was a union of church and state that suppressed speech and the freedom of the press in England. It was a union of church and state that prohibited the work of translation of the Bible, which changed the world. It was a union of church and state that necessitated his flight to Europe. It was a union of church and state that killed him.

We respectfully ask that the Department of Justice, in considering the issue of public guidance of the separation of church and state, consider the history of William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania and early Founding Father, who was repeatedly jailed for his religious faith in England. The Pennsylvania Colony became a haven, not from atheist persecutors but from religious persecutors who did not believe in the separation of church and state. The same is true of Roger Williams, founder of the colony of Rhode Island, who was ordered arrested for declaring that the civil magistrate cannot enforce the first table of the Decalogue. We ask that the Committee take into account the brutal public whipping of President Abraham Lincoln's five-time great-grandfather, Obadiah Holmes, in the Massachusetts colony, for the "crime" of religious dissent. Obadiah Holmes was not whipped by atheists. He was whipped by Puritan bigots who did not believe in the separation of church and state. We respectfully request that the Department of Justice consider this history in the issuance of public guidance on the subject.

We are concerned that the Committee neglected to take into account the impact of the separation of church and state on the other rights codified in the First Amendment. Free speech and freedom of the press, for example, owe their flourishing in the modern world in large part to the separation of church and state in America. Prior to the protections in the First Amendment, the Roman Catholic Church for centuries maintained a list of banned books called the Index Librorum Prohibitorum. The books were subject to confiscation, and the possession of them resulted in the punishment of the owner.

Unfortunately, the Committee makes no mention of the censorship in this context of Galileo and Kepler, Kant and Locke, John Milton and Maimonedes, John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, David Hume and Edward Gibbon, and many others, all at the behest of the Roman Papacy, which is itself a union of church and state. Free speech in the Western world is the legacy of those who risked the wrath of a unified church and state, often at the cost of their lives. We would also ask that the Department of Justice consider the repeated modern calls from the papal power today for the censorship of the internet and the suppression of free speech, contrary to the First Amendment. [4] We have no doubt that the censorship of Galileo, Kepler, Milton, and others was prosecuted under the justification of the censorship of misinformation, also.

The Roman Church was not alone in this persecution, either. We would ask the Department of Justice in its formulation of public guidance on the separation of church and state to remember the religious persecutions carried out at the behest of John Calvin in Geneva against religious dissenters such as Michael Servetus, who paid with his life for his writings and teachings. Servetus was executed by a union of church and state. We are concerned at the public statements of those who would create such a system in America. [5]

Therefore, we respectfully ask, what proper guidance can the Department of Justice hope to give to the public on the "proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the separation of church and state" if it is directed in its object by a Committee and a Committee Chair, who has neglected to more

fully analyze the reasons for the separation of church and state, or the reasons why the United States codified the disestablishment of church and state in the First Amendment in the first instance?

The reference to the wall of separation between church and state is not only mentioned by President Thomas Jefferson in the letter to the Danbury Baptists, which, of course, it is. [6] What is often left out of the narrative is that Jefferson said that he personally believed that the principle of the separation of church and state is codified in the Constitution. Therein, Jefferson wrote: "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church & State." [7]

James Madison wrote, "It is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties. We hold this prudent jealousy to be the first duty of Citizens and one of the noblest characteristics of the late Revolution. The free men of America did not wait till usurped power had strengthened itself by exercise and entangled the question in precedents. They saw all the consequences in the principle, and they avoided the consequences by denying the principle. We revere this lesson too much soon to forget it." [8]

Lastly, we object to the recommendation of the Committee that the Johnson Amendment be removed. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are mindful of Our Lord's words that we "render to Caesar what is Caesar, and to God the things that are God's." [9] Jesus Christ established the principle of the separation of church and state and taught that what belongs to God cannot be rendered to Caesar. The application of this teaching is that religionists, ambitious for civil power, and politicians, ambitious for their endorsement, are to be kept separate in the American system of politics, as the Constitution requires. The union of church and state results in the corruption of both, a result that neither should desire, and neither can afford.

Madison stated that "The 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." [10] And he was right. If the Johnson Amendment is removed, religionists who want civil power will publicly stump and promise their votes and congregational dollars in exchange for political favors, and the politicians will be doubtless all too eager to reciprocate in the form of legislation that the religionists desire, provided they will aid their attempts to gain office.

In his anonymous treatise published in the Boston Gazette, John Adams, later the second President of the United States, wrote that canon law was a tyrannical form of government, as was feudal law, but that the worst of all forms of governments was a union of the two. [11] And it was Madison who stated that, "In the Papal System, Government and Religion are in a manner consolidated, & that is found to be the worst of Governments."

We respectfully request, therefore, that the Department of Justice not adopt recommendations 1 and 9 of the Committee and that it adopt recommendation 1 of the Committee that it convene a public hearing, with written and oral submissions from the public, to more comprehensively study the

question of the separation of church and state in history, and in American history in particular, a study which we would enthusiastically support.

We remain, Yours truly,

[THE UNDERSIGNED]

[1] https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/president-trumps-religious-liberty-commission-delivers-historic-report-draft
[2] Ibid, [Emphasis added].
[3] https://www.chron.com/politics/article/dan-patrick-church-state-constitution-viral-22323383.php
[4] https://reclaimthenet.org/pope-francis-calls-on-social-media-platforms-to-censor-more-misinformation;
[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAUkMwlWYB8; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMBiPIfx-UA
[6] https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html
[7] https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html – Jefferson here is clearly referring to Congress. That Congress is prohibited by the Constitution from making a union of church and state.
[8] James Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments
[9] Matthew 22:21
[10] James Madison, Letter to Robert Walsh, March 2, 1819.
[11] John Adams, Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law, 1765.
https://www.masshist.org/publications/adams-papers/index.php/view/PJA01dg2

From: "andrea cosimo d'amicis" <[redacted]>
To: "(Salmaahemed) Salma El Omla - Digital Journalist - Dubai (AE)"
<[redacted]>, "[redacted]" <[redacted]>, "ads
(truthsocial.com)" <[redacted]>, "[redacted]"
<[redacted]>, Agence Ivoirienne de Presse - Ivory Coast <[redacted]>,
Agence Kampuchea Presse <[redacted]>, "[redacted]"
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<[redacted]>, Ambasciata Italiana a Mosca <[redacted]>,
"Ambassador Secretariat Italy of the Nato (Brussels)" <[redacted]>,
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"[redacted] <marketing@al-jazirah.com>, "[redacted], Media-Relations of British Embassy in Moscow Moscow <[redacted], "[redacted]" <[redacted], Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation <[redacted] News Cambodia <[redacted]
"[redacted], LegalNotices <[redacted]
"[redacted], Office - Archbishop (Shawn McKnight) of Kansas City (US)" <[redacted], "Office Secretary (Thomas S. Robertson) of the Archbishop Robert McElroy - Archdiocese of Washington DC" <[redacted]
"[redacted], Operational Headquarters - Dicastery for Communication - Vatican City <[redacted]
"[redacted], "Paolo Santalucia (for Associated Press - AP News)" <[redacted], Patriarcato Venezia - Curia <[redacted], Patriarcato Venezia - Ufficio Stampa <[redacted],

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<[redacted]>, "support (truthsocial.com)"
<[redacted]>, "Synodal Depart. Church Moscow Patriarchate" <contact@sinfo-mp.ru>, "Tahiti Nui Television (Polynesie Francaise - PF)" <[redacted]>,
"[redacted]" <[redacted]>, "[redacted]" <[redacted]>,
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"[redacted] (Chicago Sun Time News - USA)" <[redacted]>,
"[redacted]" <[redacted]>, "[redacted]"
<[redacted]>, "[redacted]" <[redacted]>

Cc: "Foreign Intelligence Service (Russia)"o<[redacted]>, "Ukraine's Mission to the UN in New York"o<[redacted]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Andrea Cosimo D'Amicis - Praise, but not yet sufficient. - Elogio, ma non ancora sufficienti.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:04:57 -0400
Importance: Normal

Did you forget about me?

Il giorno ven 26 giu 2026 alle ore 19:09 andrea cosimo d'amicis <[redacted]> ha scritto:

> **I hope for your sake that things will never reach the point described in Matthew 24:50-51 , because I am doing everything possible to keep you from weeping and gnashing your teeth. So make the news concerning me public (Andrea Cosimo D'Amicis), and tomorrow you will be happy.**
> **Thank you 🙂.**
>
> **Spero per voi che non si arrivi mai al punto descritto in Matteo 24:50-51 , perchè io sto facendo tutto il possibile per evitarvi il pianto e lo stridore dei denti.**
> **Quindi rendete pubblica la notizia in riferimento a me (Andrea Cosimo D'Amicis), e domani sarete felici.**
> **Grazie 🙂.**
>
> Il giorno mer 24 giu 2026 alle ore 18:37 andrea cosimo d'amicis <[redacted]> ha scritto:
>
> > **1 Attachment: Declaration**
> >
> > Il giorno mar 16 giu 2026 alle ore 17:31 andrea cosimo d'amicis <[redacted]> ha scritto:
> >
> > > **See 3 attachments Email to...!**
> > > **Thank you.**
> > > **Andrea Cosimo D'Amicis**
> >
> > Il giorno lun 15 giu 2026 alle ore 18:24 andrea cosimo d'amicis <[redacted]> ha scritto:
> >
> > > **I praise yours efforts towards achieving global peace, but they are still insufficient or only temporary.**
> > > **I recommend my full blog to you, free of charge and with no profit motive, "the peace guide".**
> > > **https://the-peace-guide.blogspot.com**
> > > **Thank you.**
> > > **Andrea Cosimo D'Amicis**
> > >
> > > Elogio i vostri tentativi per una pace globale, ma sono solo insufficienti o solo temporanei.

Vi consiglio, senza scopo di lucro, e gratuitamente il mio blog completo, "la guida per la pace".
https://the-peace-guide.blogspot.com
Grazie.
Andrea Cosimo D'Amicis

From: Nancy DeGrie <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Freedom
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:05:04 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Sirs,

Please do not unite church and state. Our first amendment to the Constitution states that Congress shall make no law establishing religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.
Our ancestors came from Europe and other places to escape religious persecution. Don't bring it to the USA!
Keep America FREE!
Sincerely,
Nancy DeGrie

From: stacy shanahan <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and state is needed
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:05:18 -0400
Importance: Normal

Hello,
I appreciate the freedoms that we have in America. I am a Christian and my neighbor may not be, Im thankful that we have the choice to worship God or NOT at all.

You cant legislate morality or living rightly.

I agree with separation of church and state and ask that you please leave it as is.

Thanks so much
Stacy Shanahan
LaFollette, TN

From: Eric Nelson <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Regarding recent pronouncements
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:07:02 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

As a concerned American Citizen and Christian, I write to tell you I support the separation of church and state. I do not support attempts to denigrate this key principle at the core of the American success story.

Sincerely,

Eric Nelson

From: Jonnatan Herrera <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Draft Report – Jonnatan Herrera
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:07:48 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty,
I am writing to formally submit my public comment regarding the Commission's draft report. As a citizen and an advocate for the strict separation of church and state, I strongly object to the recommendations that seek to dismantle the protections keeping partisan politics out of our houses of worship.
Specifically, I oppose the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment. This provision was enacted in 1954 and has stood successfully for 72 years without hindering genuine religious expression. There is no legitimate reason to repeal a protection that has worked perfectly fine for over seven decades.
Individuals in this country—whether they are pastors, faith leaders, or members of a congregation—already possess the full constitutional right to express their personal political opinions, vote, and engage in the civic process outside of the church. Because individual freedom of speech is already fully protected, there is absolutely no need to mix official religious services with partisan political activities.
Bringing political campaigns and candidate endorsements into the pulpit will only invite financial corruption and divide congregations. History consistently proves that whenever religion and state politics are mixed, it ultimately backfires—resulting in government overreach that revokes and takes away the very freedoms we enjoy.
I urge the Commission to reject these changes, protect the integrity of the pulpit, and maintain the clear separation of church and state that has kept our nation both free and faithful.
Thank you for your time and for considering this comment.
Sincerely,
Jonnatan Herrera
Westmoreland, TN

From: Jai Hewletto [redacted]
To: "RLC (OASG)" [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – JAI
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:07:59 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen of Seale, Alabama, holding to a simple conviction: the freedom I enjoy should never limit the freedom of another, but should all the more motivate me to help preserve the freedom of everyone. This is not a modern slogan to me; it is the same conviction I find running through Scripture, through our founding documents, and through the plain logic of how free exercise actually works. I ask you to weigh three arguments as you consider this Commission's recommendations.

The first is not secular but Christian. Christ himself divided human duty into two jurisdictions when he said to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's. Testifying before a Senate committee in 1888 against a national Sunday law, Jones drew out the implication: "There is a limit to the lawmaking power; and that limit is the line which Jesus Christ has drawn. The government has no right to make any law relating to the things that pertain to God, or offenses against God, or religion." The state may rightly ask whether an act injures a neighbor's person or property; it has no competence to ask whether that act honors or dishonors God. So when government sponsors a religious text, display, or lesson, the problem is not that this is too religious for a secular state to bear. The problem is that it crosses a boundary Christ himself set, and no civil authority, however well meaning, may rightly cross it.

Second, even a law favoring my own faith destroys the very liberty it claims to protect, because it concedes that religion is a proper object of legislation at all, and whoever controls that legislature next may not share my convictions. Jones stated the danger for believers who welcome such favor: "No man can ever safely consent to legislation in favor of the form of faith or worship which he himself professes. In so doing he resigns his right to profess some other form of faith if he should become convinced that other form is nearer the truth than his own." That includes my freedom to keep searching, to be persuaded, to change as conscience leads. A law that locks in today's majority faith does not secure it; it freezes it, and hands the machinery to whoever wins the next election.

Third, those who claim the Founders never intended real separation should answer James Madison in his own words to the Virginia ratifying convention: "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." This separation was not carelessness or hostility toward faith; churches themselves, weary of establishment imposed from above, pressed for exactly this settlement. A commission that invokes the Founders to justify state-sponsored religion carries the burden of explaining away Madison in Madison's own words.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
JAI
Seale, AL

From: Eric <[redacted]>
To: "rlc" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to Draft Report of the Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:09:10 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

The influence from your proposals and deliberations will obviously have a major impact on the greatest country in the world at this time.

This is why I urge you to think carefully and deliberately regarding why many of those who founded this great country left their motherlands in Europe. Many of the best of them left the homes of their ancestors because a church was dominant in their country and it happened to have a control over the state. This church-state connection forced their interpretation of "God's will" on everyone in their realm. This often meant that the Scriptures could not be translated or possessed in the common language of the masses. This might mean in some cases that citizens were required on pain of death to participate in a ceremony that claimed to create the actual body and blood of Christ and then make everyone eat it (The Mass). The blood of martyrs still cries out to God from these "Dark Ages."

You may think these examples extreme, but in Revelation 13 two powers are presented and the second causes all the earth to receive the mark of the beast. There is a "no buy no sell" penalty and increasing to capital punishment.

Let's return to the placid and inspired vision of Roger Williams who clearly saw the immortal truth that none should compel the conscience of others. Let's leave the worship of our God, or any god, to the free conscience of all and not entangle the government of our great land with religion of any kind.

In the end of time, "worship" will be forced by increasing penalties. On our watch, let not this be the case. The blood of millions still tells us that when religion is united with the state, corruption is inevitable and persecution is the result.

Sincerely,

Eric Rose
Executive Director
Daniel Twelve-Three, Inc.

From: Sunnysher <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT—Separation of Church and State—Sherrie Rouse
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:09:55 -0400
Importance: Normal

The United States has historically supported separation between church and state to protect both religious freedom and government neutrality. This principle is rooted in the First Amendment, which prohibits government establishment of religion while protecting free exercise. Influenced by experiences with state-controlled churches in Europe, founders like James Madison and Thomas Jefferson believed religion and government should not control one another. The phrase "wall of separation" describes this concept, though Americans continue to debate its exact boundaries

Please continue to recognize the importance of our historic position as a nation and keep church and state separate.

Sent from my iPhone

From: Dennis Wicklund <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT [Religious Liberty Commission Report] [Dennis Wicklund]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:11:49 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: From-Separation-to-Partnership-Addressing-the-Religious-Liberty-Commission.pdf

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Please see attached pamphlet.

In my own words,

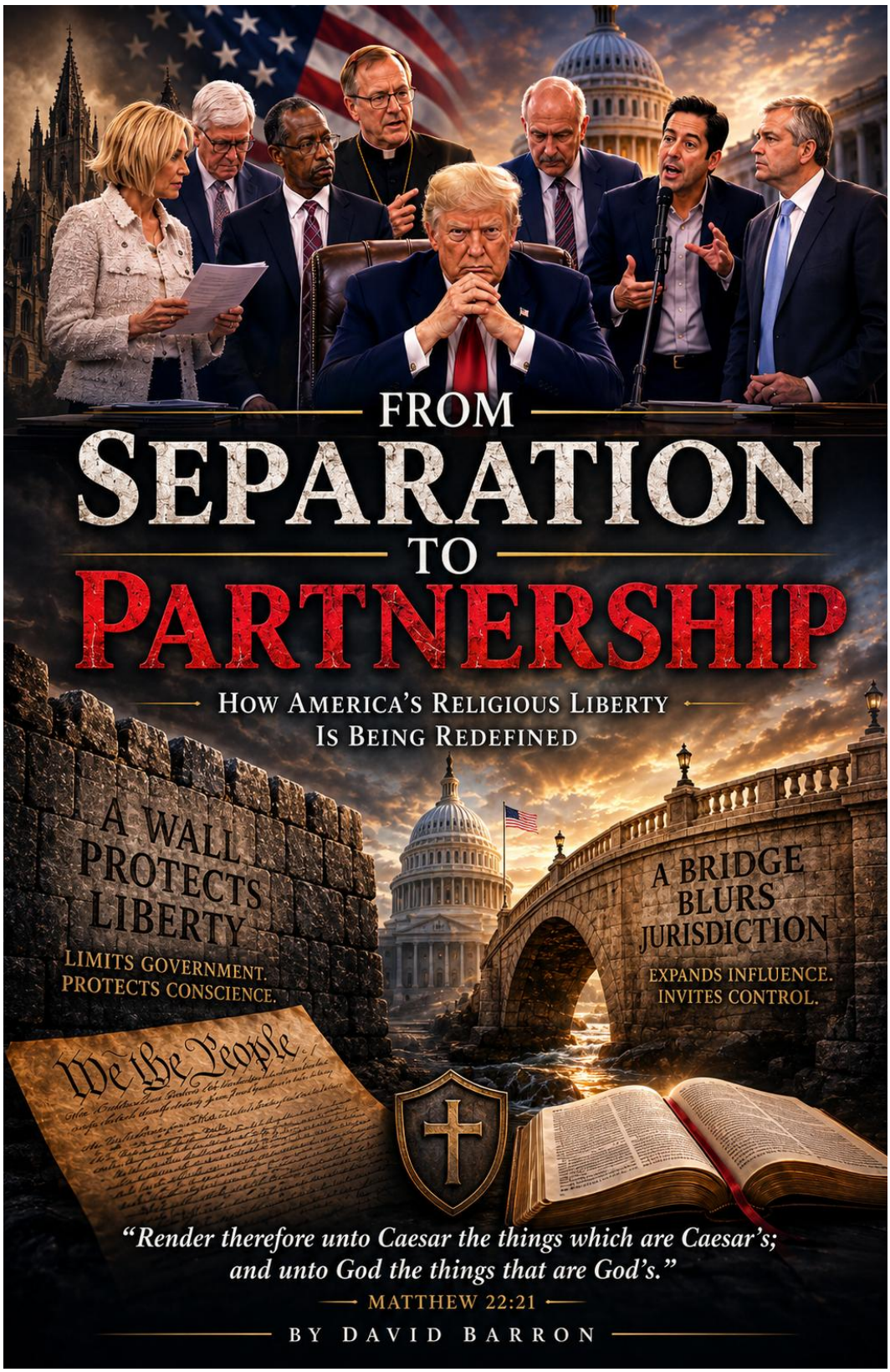
I respect the rule of law under the power of the state. I respect the efforts of the various religious bodies which grace our nation in preservation of the right of the people to peaceably assemble, and to defend the element of the first amendment that congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, etc...

If I agreed with our leaders who have proposed that the separation of church and state should be abandoned as a constitutional right, then I would be giving consent to them controlling Bible, or any other proposed religious document, understanding and right to freely interpret the facts therein. Similarly, I would be giving consent to Popes, bishops, pastors, evangelists, Jesuits, Freemasons, and other potential enemies of the gospel, to control legislation that protect those of diverse faiths.

The U.S. constitution was carefully, and painstakingly framed with the express commitment to the ideals of Protestant principle. "We hold these truths to be self-evident." The framers were bathed in history's blood which was shed regarding the fiber of true, Godly, morality. This, in turn, reflected the glimmering light of the essential necessity of keeping the church to the church, and keeping the power of the state for it's separate purpose and function. Any example where the two have attempted to conspire, collude, exercise controlling power over, have a pope at the head of state, or have a military commander at the head of the church, have ended in loss of life and liberty.

The most defining example of this is readily seen in the Bible account of Babylon and it's king, Nebuchadnezzar. The religious leaders of his age made a defining law that forbade specific worship on pain of death for the king to back by the state's arm. If we were to repeat this today, we shouldn't expect a different result. If the facts of Bible history were applied to the agenda of the current leadership's push to end separation of church and state, the only conclusion as to what their intent truly is, is the loss of life and liberty. What American would really want these?

For God and country,
Dennis Wicklund


FROM
SEPARATION
TO
PARTNERSHIP
How America's Religious Liberty
Is Being Redefined
A WALL PROTECTS LIBERTY
LIMITS GOVERNMENT.
PROTECTS CONSCIENCE.
A BRIDGE BLURS JURISDICTION
EXPANDS INFLUENCE.
INVITES CONTROL.
We the People
"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's;
and unto God the things that are God's."
MATTHEW 22:21
BY DAVID BARRON

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DOJ-RLC Comment-012595

How the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Redefines Religious Liberty

The Question Before America- Introduction

For more than two centuries, the United States has understood religious liberty to rest upon a simple but profound principle. Thomas Jefferson expressed it in his famous letter to the Danbury Baptist Association:

*"Believing with you that religion is a matter which **lies solely between Man & his God**, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach **actions only, & NOT OPINIONS**."*

President Donald Trump receives the report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission at the White House. This booklet examines the Commission's recommendations in eradicating the term "separation of church and state".

Those words captured the historic American understanding of liberty of conscience. Civil government was ordained by God, but its authority was deliberately limited. It was entrusted with the responsibility of preserving justice, protecting life, and maintaining civil order. It was **not** entrusted with authority over faith, worship, or the conscience.

The issue has never been whether government is ordained by God. Scripture plainly teaches that it is. The issue has always been where God said government must stop.

The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission affirms the importance of religion and rightly recognizes the vital role faith has played in the history of the United States. Yet its recommendations represent a significant shift in emphasis. Rather than defining religious liberty primarily by the constitutional limits placed upon civil government, the Commission encourages a closer institutional relationship between

DOJ-RLC Comment-012596

government and religion. It proposes replacing the familiar "wall of separation" with a "bridge" between church and state.

This booklet argues that the question before America is not whether religion should influence society. It should. Nor is the question whether government should protect the free exercise of religion. It must.

The question is whether civil government should move beyond protecting religious liberty and begin fostering an institutional partnership with religion.

That question reaches far beyond constitutional interpretation. It touches the biblical distinction Christ established between His kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. It shaped the convictions of America's founders, influenced the framing of the First Amendment, and ultimately points forward to the final conflict over worship described in Bible prophecy.

The pages that follow examine that question from three perspectives—Scripture, history, and the Constitution, to determine whether America's historic understanding of liberty of conscience is being preserved or redefined.

The conscience is not outside God's government—it is outside Caesar's.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012597

Chapter One - Liberty of Conscience Begins with God

Religious liberty is not first a constitutional principle. **It is a biblical principle.**

Long before legislatures enacted laws, before nations drafted constitutions, and before courts interpreted rights, God established the proper relationship between His kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. The distinction between civil authority and the conscience did not originate with Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Roger Williams, or any other statesman. It originated with Jesus Christ.

One of the clearest statements ever made concerning that distinction occurred while Jesus stood before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Accused of claiming to be a king, Jesus answered:

"My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence." (John 18:36)

This declaration establishes the foundation upon which every discussion of religious liberty must rest. Christ was not denying the legitimacy of civil government. He was defining its jurisdiction.

In fact, only a few verses later Jesus acknowledged that Pilate's authority had been given "from above" (John 19:11). Civil government has a legitimate place within God's order. Yet Christ made it unmistakably clear that His kingdom operates upon entirely different principles.

Earthly governments preserve civil order. They enact laws, punish crime, defend innocent life, and bear the sword against evildoers. Christ's kingdom advances in another way. It governs not by civil force, but by truth, conviction, love, and the work of the Holy Spirit upon the conscience. It never compels genuine faith by civil power.

Jesus explained the difference in a single sentence:

DOJ-RLC Comment-012598

"If My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight."

Earthly kingdoms ultimately rely upon force to maintain their authority. Christ's kingdom does not. Faith produced by coercion is not faith at all. A government may compel outward actions, but it cannot produce love for God. It may punish crime, but it cannot create holiness. It may command attendance, but it cannot command worship. Worship belongs to another kingdom.

Christ's words establish the biblical foundation of liberty of conscience. His kingdom does not spread by the sword of Caesar but by the power of truth working upon willing hearts.

The Two Jurisdictions
Jesus reinforced this principle when asked whether taxes should be paid to Caesar. Holding up a coin, He answered:

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21)

With these few words, Christ established two distinct jurisdictions. Caesar possesses legitimate authority. God possesses supreme authority. The question is not whether government has authority. Scripture plainly teaches that it does. The question is **what authority God has entrusted to it.**

Worship belongs to God. Faith belongs to God. Conscience belongs to God. No earthly ruler may rightfully claim what belongs exclusively to the Creator. Whenever civil government attempts to prescribe doctrine, direct worship, or compel religious belief, it reaches beyond the authority God has granted it. Those things belong to **God's jurisdiction** alone.

God Ordained Civil Government
The Bible does not teach anarchy. The Apostle Paul wrote:

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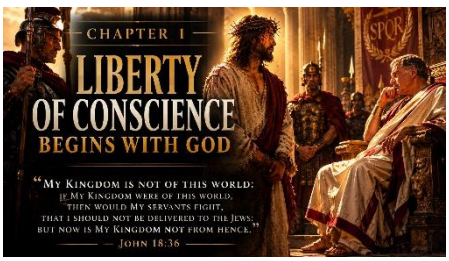
"For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." (Romans 13:1)

Civil government is God's servant for the preservation of society. Paul explains that rulers are appointed to reward those who do good and punish those who do evil. They "bear not the sword in vain," for they are "the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:4).

The sword is a civil instrument. It exists to restrain violence, protect innocent life, punish crime, and preserve public order. It was never given to enforce faith, determine doctrine, compel worship, or govern the conscience. God entrusted civil rulers with authority over civil matters—not over the conscience.



Romans 13 establishes both the authority and the limits of civil government. The magistrate bears the sword to preserve civil order and punish those who commit outward acts of evil. Yet nowhere does Scripture authorize civil government to compel worship, prescribe doctrine, or govern the heart. Those belong to God's jurisdiction alone. Civil rulers judge outward conduct; God alone judges the heart.

This distinction is essential. Not every sin falls within the jurisdiction of civil government. God condemns pride, covetousness, lust, hatred, envy, unbelief, idolatry, and every sinful thought of the heart. These are violations of God's moral law, yet they are not crimes that the civil magistrate is authorized to punish. No government can imprison a man for coveting his neighbor's house, fine him for pride, or sentence him for hatred in his heart. These sins are real, and God will judge them, but He has reserved that judgment to Himself.

Civil government is ordained to punish outward acts that violate the rights and safety of others—murder, theft, fraud, violence, and similar

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offenses. It was never commissioned to enforce the whole of God's moral law. If it were, the magistrate would be required to punish every violation of the Ten Commandments, including idolatry, unbelief, covetousness, and every sinful desire of the heart. Furthermore, with the punishment of death. We would all be guilty. (Romans 3:19) Scripture gives no such authority.

This is the distinction of jurisdiction. God ordained civil government to restrain outward acts that disturb the peace and safety of society. He never entrusted it with authority over worship, faith, repentance, doctrine, or the conscience. Those remain under His government alone.

The Limits of Civil Authority
The apostles themselves recognized this distinction. When commanded by the Jewish authorities to stop preaching Christ, Peter answered:

"We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

Peter did not deny the legitimacy of civil government, nor did he call for rebellion. He simply recognized that civil authority has limits. Whenever earthly rulers command what God forbids, or forbid what God commands, the jurisdiction of Caesar has ended and the jurisdiction of God remains supreme.

This is the very essence of liberty of conscience. No government possesses the authority to stand between God and the individual soul.

Faith Cannot Be Forced
Throughout Scripture, God appeals to mankind through persuasion rather than coercion.

Moses pleaded: *"I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life."* (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Joshua challenged Israel: *"Choose you this day whom ye will serve."* (Joshua 24:15)

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Paul wrote: *"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* (Romans 10:17)

Again he declared: *"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men."* (2 Corinthians 5:11)

The biblical pattern is unmistakable. God reveals truth. He invites. He warns. He pleads. He persuades. He never produces genuine worship through civil compulsion. If the Almighty Himself does not force the conscience, no earthly government has the right to do so.

Conclusion

The Scriptures establish two governments, each ordained by God for a distinct purpose. Civil government exists to preserve justice, punish wrongdoing, and protect society. It governs outward conduct. Christ's kingdom governs the heart, transforming the conscience through truth, love, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Confusing these two jurisdictions has produced some of the darkest chapters in human history. Whenever the church has sought the sword of the state, or the state has assumed authority over the conscience, liberty has suffered and religion has been corrupted. The chapters that follow will demonstrate how this biblical principle profoundly influenced the development of religious liberty in America, shaped the thinking of the nation's founders, and remains the defining issue in the ongoing debate over the proper relationship between church and state.

Biblical religious liberty is therefore far more than a constitutional principle. It is a divine principle established by Christ Himself.

Civil government is ordained by God, but it was never ordained to govern the conscience. The conscience belongs to God. Caesar has no rightful claim upon it.

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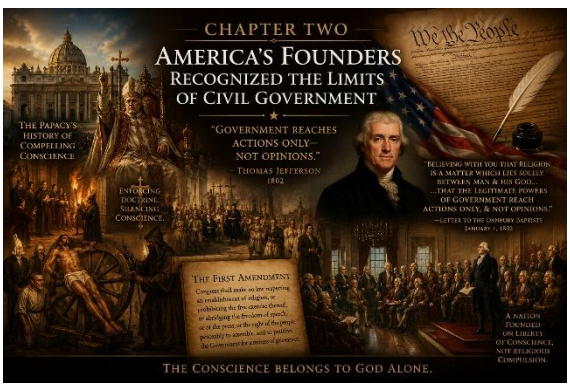
Chapter 2 - America's Founders Recognized the Limits of Civil Government

The principle of liberty of conscience did not begin with America's founders. As we saw in the previous chapter, it began with Jesus Christ Himself, who distinguished His kingdom from the kingdoms of this world and taught that what belongs to God must never be claimed by Caesar.

The founders of the United States did not invent this principle. Rather, they recognized it after centuries of painful experience and sought to preserve it in the constitutional system they established.

The American experiment in religious liberty was born from HISTORY For centuries, Europe witnessed repeated attempts to enforce religious conformity through civil power. Kings legislated doctrine. Magistrates enforced religious decrees. Churches relied upon the sword of the state to preserve orthodoxy, while governments relied upon religious institutions to strengthen political authority.

The result was not religious unity. It was persecution, imprisonment, confiscation of property, exile, torture, and death. America's founders knew this history well, and they were determined not to repeat it.



Roger Williams
Long before the American Revolution, Roger Williams recognized the danger of uniting church and state. A Puritan minister in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Williams believed that civil government had no authority over matters of faith and conscience. His convictions brought him into direct conflict with the colony's leaders, who believed the civil magistrate should help

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preserve religious uniformity. In 1635, Williams was banished from Massachusetts because of these convictions.

After establishing the colony of Rhode Island, he sought to build a society where liberty of conscience would be protected and civil government would exercise no authority over worship.

Describing the proper relationship between church and state, Williams wrote of: *"...the hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wilderness of the world."*

Williams' concern was not to protect the government from religion. It was to protect the church from the corrupting influence of civil power. He understood that once the civil magistrate entered the affairs of religion, both institutions would suffer. The church would gradually lose its spiritual independence, while the state would become entangled in matters that belonged to God alone.

Isaac Backus
A century later, Baptist minister Isaac Backus continued the same argument. Opposing the establishment of religion by civil government, he wrote:
"God has appointed two kinds of government in the world, which are in their nature and ought never to be confounded together."

Backus understood what Christ had taught centuries earlier. God ordained civil government to preserve justice and order, but He never gave it authority over faith or worship. To confuse those two governments was to violate the jurisdiction God Himself had established.

The language differs from Christ's teaching about rendering unto Caesar and unto God, but the principle is identical. There are two governments, two jurisdictions, and each must remain within the sphere God has assigned it.

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John Leland
John Leland, who greatly influenced James Madison regarding the first amendment carried this principle even further. A close friend of James Madison and an influential Baptist minister during the debates surrounding the Constitution, Leland insisted that liberty of conscience was more than mere toleration.

He wrote: *"The liberty I contend for is more than toleration. The very idea of toleration is despicable."*

Leland understood that toleration assumes government possesses authority over religion and merely chooses not to exercise it. Liberty of conscience rests upon an entirely different foundation. Government has no rightful jurisdiction over the conscience in the first place.

Leland also warned: *"The notion of a Christian commonwealth should be exploded forever."*

He was not arguing against Christianity influencing society. Rather, he rejected the idea that civil government should assume responsibility for enforcing Christianity.

Thomas Jefferson
Perhaps no founder expressed this principle more clearly than Thomas Jefferson. Writing to the Danbury Baptist Association on January 1, 1802, Jefferson declared:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions."

Jefferson did not merely defend religious tolerance. He identified the proper jurisdiction of civil government. Government may regulate actions affecting civil society, but it has no jurisdiction over faith, worship, or conscience. That authority belongs to God alone.

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Years earlier, Jefferson reflected upon Europe's history with these sobering words:
"Millions of innocent men, women, and children... have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch toward uniformity."

His conclusion was unmistakable. Civil force had failed to produce genuine faith. Instead, it had produced centuries of suffering.

James Madison
James Madison shared the same conviction. Often called the "Father of the Constitution," he became one of America's strongest defenders of liberty of conscience. Reflecting upon Europe's long history of religious persecution, Madison wrote:
"The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."

Madison was not speaking in the abstract. He was looking back upon centuries in which civil governments enforced religious conformity through the power of the state. Throughout much of the Middle Ages and beyond, church and civil authorities worked together to suppress what they regarded as heresy. The result was imprisonment, torture, confiscation of property, exile, and death.

Both Madison and Jefferson reached the same conclusion. Civil force cannot produce genuine faith. Instead of preserving religion, it corrupts both the church and the state. Whether expressed as "separation," "liberty of conscience," or the "free exercise" of religion, the principle remained the same. Civil government was never intended to govern religion. Its duty is to protect every person's liberty to worship God—or to decline worship—according to the dictates of conscience, without coercion from the state.

George Washington
America's first president expressed the practical result of these principles in his famous letter to the Hebrew Congregation at Newport

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in 1790:
"The Government of the United States... gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."

Washington did not speak merely of toleration. He envisioned a nation in which citizens of every faith could worship freely because government neither established religion nor persecuted those who differed.

The Constitution would not create religious liberty. Rather, it would protect the liberty of conscience that belongs to every person as a gift from God.

The First Amendment
These principles found expression in the First Amendment to the Constitution:
"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

Notice that the Amendment accomplishes two complementary purposes. First, it prevents the civil government from establishing religion. Second, it protects the free exercise of religion. These are not competing ideas, they are inseparable. Government refrains from exercising authority over religion precisely so that religion may remain free.

The freedom of the church depends upon the restraint of the state.

Is "Separation of Church and State" in the Constitution?
One objection frequently raised today is that the phrase "separation of church and state" never appears in the Constitution. That observation is correct. The exact phrase is not found in the Constitution. But the question is not whether Jefferson's particular wording appears. The question is whether the principle appears.

The First Amendment declares:

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"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

Those words establish two complementary principles. Civil government may not establish religion, and it may not interfere with the free exercise of religion. Thomas Jefferson later described this constitutional arrangement as building **"a wall of separation between Church & State."** He was not inventing a new constitutional doctrine. He was describing the practical effect of the First Amendment.

Jefferson was not alone. James Madison defended the same principle. Roger Williams described a hedge or wall separating the church from the wilderness of the world. Isaac Backus spoke of two governments that "ought never to be confounded together." John Leland insisted that government possesses no rightful authority over the conscience. Though they expressed the idea differently, they defended the same constitutional principle: **civil government possesses no jurisdiction over religion because the conscience belongs to God.**

The issue, therefore, is not whether Jefferson's particular phrase appears in the Constitution. The issue is whether the Constitution limits civil government in matters of religion.

It plainly does.

Protecting Both Church and State

One of the greatest misunderstandings surrounding the phrase *"separation of church and state"* is the assumption that it was designed either to exclude religion from public life or merely to protect government from religious influence. The founders understood the issue differently. They believed that God had ordained both civil government and the church, but had entrusted each with a different jurisdiction.

History had repeatedly demonstrated the danger of confusing those jurisdictions. Whenever the church sought the power of the state, it gained political influence but lost its spiritual independence. Whenever

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the state assumed authority over religion, it became entangled in matters of faith and conscience that God had never entrusted to it. The result was not liberty, but persecution.

Roger Williams sought to preserve the church from the corrupting influence of civil power. Isaac Backus distinguished the two governments that God had ordained and insisted they must never be confounded. John Leland rejected mere toleration because he believed government possessed no rightful authority over the conscience. Thomas Jefferson limited the legitimate powers of government to "actions only, and not opinions." James Madison sought to spare America the religious bloodshed that had soaked the soil of Europe for centuries. George Washington envisioned a nation that would "give to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."

Though each expressed the principle in different language, they defended the same fundamental truth: civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience. By keeping church and state within their God-given spheres, they sought to preserve the independence of both institutions. The church would remain free to proclaim truth without relying upon civil power, and the government would remain free from assuming authority over worship, doctrine, or faith. In protecting liberty of conscience, they protected both the church and the state from exercising authority that belonged only to God.

Conclusion

America's founders did not establish liberty of conscience because they distrusted religion. They established it because they understood both Scripture and history. They recognized that Christ's kingdom advances through truth rather than force, and they deliberately limited the jurisdiction of civil government to preserve that principle.

For nearly 250 years, this understanding of liberty of conscience has distinguished the United States from the systems that preceded it. The question now before the nation is whether that historic understanding will be preserved, or fundamentally redefined.

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Chapter 3 -Religious Liberty Redefined

"The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." — Thomas Jefferson

A New Direction
The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission was established to examine the state of religious liberty in America and recommend ways to strengthen it. At first glance, many of its recommendations appear commendable. The report affirms the importance of religion, recognizes the indispensable role faith has played throughout American history, and calls for protecting the free exercise of religion. Every Christian should welcome sincere efforts to preserve the freedom to worship God according to the dictates of conscience.

The question before us, however, is not whether religious liberty should be protected. The question is **how the Commission defines religious liberty.** Throughout history, liberty has seldom disappeared by being openly abolished. More often it has been redefined until the original principle is scarcely recognized.

For nearly 250 years, the American understanding of religious liberty rested upon a simple constitutional principle: **civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience.** Government protected religious liberty precisely because it limited its own authority. The Commission proposes a different emphasis.

Rather than focusing primarily upon the constitutional limits of civil authority, the report repeatedly encourages a closer relationship between government and religious institutions. That shift becomes especially clear in its discussion of the historic concept of the separation of church and state.

The report states:
"The concept of a 'wall of separation between church and state' can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another... Perhaps a better analogy is that religious liberty acts as a bridge between church and state."

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This statement deserves careful consideration because metaphors reveal assumptions. A wall establishes a boundary. A bridge establishes a connection. A wall limits jurisdiction. A bridge facilitates cooperation. Whether one prefers Jefferson's terminology or another expression, the historic American principle remained the same: civil government protects religious liberty by recognizing the limits of its own authority. The Commission's proposed metaphor points in a different direction.

From Protection to Partnership

That change in emphasis is reflected throughout the Commission's report. It recommends expanded cooperation with faith-based organizations, broader opportunities for religious organizations to receive government funding, repeal of the Johnson Amendment, additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life, the creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty, and even points to historical examples of governmental encouragement of Sabbath observance as positive precedents.

Each recommendation may be evaluated on its own merits. Taken together, however, they reveal a consistent shift in emphasis. For nearly two and a half centuries, America's understanding of religious liberty sought to preserve liberty of conscience by carefully limiting the jurisdiction of civil government in matters of religion. The Commission increasingly presents religious liberty not simply as protection from governmental interference, but as a framework for closer institutional cooperation between government and religion.

That distinction is more significant than it first appears. The historic American question was, "Where has God placed the limits of civil authority?" The Commission increasingly asks, "How can government and religion work together to strengthen society?" Those are fundamentally different questions. One preserves liberty by recognizing constitutional limits. The other encourages a closer institutional relationship between government and religion.

History demonstrates why that distinction matters. Once government becomes a partner with religion, it cannot avoid making religious

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judgments. It must determine which organizations qualify for public support, which religious practices deserve official recognition, and where the limits are to be drawn. The Commission's favorable reference to Abraham Lincoln's order encouraging Sabbath observance illustrates how quickly these questions move from protecting religious liberty to government encouraging religious practice. Whether future generations apply that principle more broadly, including questions surrounding Sunday observance, is a question Americans should not dismiss lightly.

Whether that shift ultimately strengthens religious liberty or gradually expands the role of civil government in religious affairs is the central question examined throughout this booklet.

Public Religion Is Not the Issue

At this point an important clarification is necessary. Nothing in this discussion suggests that religion should be confined to private life. Scripture teaches the opposite. Jesus preached publicly. The apostles preached publicly. The prophets addressed kings. Christians are called to proclaim the gospel, defend truth, care for the poor, pursue justice, and bear witness before rulers and nations.

The issue has never been whether religion should influence society. The issue is whether civil government should become institutionally involved in religion. Those are fundamentally different questions. A free church should influence the nation through persuasion, preaching, and faithful witness. A constitutional government should protect that freedom without assuming authority over religion itself.

The Question of Jurisdiction

Ultimately, every discussion concerning religious liberty returns to a single question:

What authority has God entrusted to civil government?

Scripture answers that question clearly. Civil government exists to preserve order, protect life, restrain violence, and punish crime. Worship, doctrine, faith, and conscience belong to another jurisdiction, and it is the duty of the civil government to protect the freedom of it.

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History repeatedly demonstrates what happens when that distinction is forgotten. Governments that begin by supporting religion eventually find themselves deciding religious questions. Which beliefs qualify for protection? Which religious organizations deserve public support? Which doctrines fall outside acceptable limits? Who determines what constitutes heresy? These questions are unavoidable whenever civil authority crosses into matters of conscience.

That is precisely the danger America's founders sought to prevent.

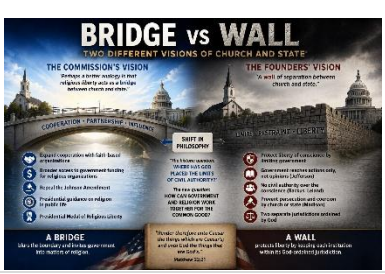
Why This Matters

The issue before America is therefore much larger than a disagreement over a metaphor. The question is whether the constitutional principle that protected liberty of conscience is being quietly redefined.

Replacing a wall with a bridge may sound harmless, but history teaches that liberty is rarely lost in a single dramatic moment. More often it is surrendered gradually, one definition at a time, one principle at a time, until the original safeguards are scarcely recognized.

If America's understanding of religious liberty shifts from protecting the conscience by limiting civil jurisdiction to encouraging institutional alliance between government and religion, then America has begun moving away from the constitutional principles that distinguished it from the Old World.

Before determining whether that shift represents progress or departure, we must first recognize that history itself presents two very different understandings of religious liberty. One sought to preserve liberty by limiting the authority of civil government in matters of religion. The other envisioned a closer relationship between civil authority and religious truth. Understanding those two models is essential before evaluating the direction America is now taking.



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Chapter 4 -Two Competing Historical Understandings of Religious Liberty

By the close of the eighteenth century, the United States had embraced a principle that distinguished it from nearly every nation in the world. Civil government would possess no jurisdiction over the conscience. Religion would neither be established by Congress nor prohibited by Congress, and the free exercise of religion would be protected because the conscience belonged to God alone.

This understanding did not arise in a vacuum. It emerged after centuries of conflict over the relationship between civil government and religion. To appreciate the significance of America's constitutional system, it is necessary to compare it with another historical understanding of religious liberty that prevailed throughout much of Europe for centuries. This comparison is not intended to criticize individuals or denominations. It is simply an examination of two different historical models.

The American Model

The American understanding of religious liberty rested upon one fundamental principle: **civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience.** As we have seen, this conviction was championed by Roger Williams, Isaac Backus, John Leland, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and ultimately embodied in the First Amendment. Though each expressed the principle differently, they agreed that the authority of civil government reached only its proper sphere.

Thomas Jefferson summarized that principle with remarkable clarity when he wrote:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions."

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Jefferson's distinction is both simple and profound. Government reaches actions, not opinions, worship, or conscience. Those belong to God alone.

James Madison expressed the same concern when reflecting upon the religious wars that had devastated Europe:
"The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."

These convictions found constitutional expression in the First Amendment, which prohibited Congress from establishing religion while protecting its free exercise. Under this model, religion remained free because civil government remained limited. The state's responsibility was not to determine religious truth but to protect every citizen's liberty of conscience.

The Historical Papal Model
For many centuries, the relationship between church and civil government developed differently throughout much of Catholic Europe. Rather than treating religion solely as a matter beyond civil jurisdiction, influential papal documents taught that civil society owed duties toward the true religion.

Pope Gregory XVI, writing in *Mirari Vos* (1832), rejected unrestricted liberty of conscience in some of the strongest language of the nineteenth century. Referring to what he viewed as religious indifferentism, he wrote:

"From this poisoned source of indifferentism flows that absurd and erroneous proposition, or rather delirium, that liberty of conscience must be asserted and vindicated for everyone."

Pope Pius IX reaffirmed the same position in *Quanta Cura* (1864), describing liberty of conscience as **"a most pestilential error."**

Pope Leo XIII continued this line of thought in *Libertas* (1888), writing:

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"Let us examine that liberty in individuals which is so opposed to the virtue of religion... A liberty such as we have described... is no liberty, but is degradation."

These statements did not deny the importance of religion. Rather, they reflected a different understanding of the relationship between civil authority and religious truth. Whereas Jefferson argued that religion lies solely between man and God, these papal documents maintained that civil society possesses obligations toward what it understands to be the true religion.

Civil Government and Religious Truth

The difference between these two systems extended beyond abstract principles. Throughout much of European history, civil rulers frequently assisted ecclesiastical authorities in suppressing heresy, enforcing religious conformity, and protecting what was regarded as the true faith. Likewise, church authorities often appealed to civil rulers to carry out judgments that the Church itself could not enforce through spiritual authority alone.

These arrangements varied considerably across countries and centuries, and their legal details changed over time. Nevertheless, they reflected a broader understanding that civil government and ecclesiastical authority could cooperate in matters concerning religion.

By contrast, the American constitutional model deliberately denied civil government jurisdiction over religious doctrine while protecting the liberty of every individual's conscience. The distinction was not merely practical. It represented two fundamentally different understandings of the relationship between church and state.

Two Different Starting Points

Although both systems acknowledged the importance of religion, they began from fundamentally different assumptions.

The American system asked, **What authority has God withheld from civil government?** Its answer was straightforward: **the conscience.** Civil

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government possesses legitimate authority over civil society, but worship, faith, and doctrine remain under God's jurisdiction alone.

The historical European model more often asked, **What duties does civil government owe toward the true religion?** Its answer generally included some form of cooperation between civil authority and religious truth as understood by the Church. Those different starting points produced two distinct understandings of religious liberty.

Why This Comparison Matters

The purpose of this chapter has not been to determine which historical model was correct. It has simply been to establish that two very different understandings of religious liberty existed. One limited civil government to its God-ordained jurisdiction and sought to protect liberty of conscience by restricting governmental authority.

Recognizing that distinction is essential before examining more recent developments. If America's understanding of religious liberty has remained unchanged, then contemporary discussions should reflect the same constitutional limits recognized by the founders. If, however, that understanding has changed, Americans should carefully examine how, why, and with what consequences.

If these two historical models differed so fundamentally, an obvious question arises: Has that difference disappeared, or has it simply been redefined?

To answer that question, we must examine the modern understanding of religious liberty and ask whether it represents a continuation of America's constitutional tradition, a development within Catholic thought, or the emergence of an entirely new relationship between church and state.

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Chapter 5- Vatican II and the Modern Understanding of Religious Liberty

The previous chapter demonstrated that two distinct historical understandings of religious liberty existed for centuries. America's founders understood liberty of conscience to mean that civil government possessed no jurisdiction over matters of faith and worship. Religion belonged to God, while government exercised authority only over civil affairs.

Historical Roman Catholic teaching approached the question differently. As we have seen, Popes Gregory XVI, Pius IX, and Leo XIII each criticized principles associated with unrestricted liberty of conscience and liberty of worship as they were understood in nineteenth-century liberal thought. That historical distinction raises an obvious question: **Did the Roman Catholic Church change its teaching on religious liberty?**

Most Catholics today answer that question by pointing to the Second Vatican Council.

Vatican II and *Dignitatis Humanae*
Between 1962 and 1965, the Roman Catholic Church convened the Second Vatican Council. Among its sixteen major documents was *Dignitatis Humanae* ("Declaration on Religious Freedom"), a document devoted entirely to the subject of religious liberty.

Its opening declaration states:
"The human person has a right to religious freedom."

The document goes on to explain that religious freedom consists in immunity from coercion by individuals, social groups, or civil authority in matters of religion.

To many readers, these statements sound remarkably similar to principles long embraced within the American constitutional tradition. At first glance, one might naturally conclude that the historical debate has been resolved. Yet the matter is more complex than it first appears.

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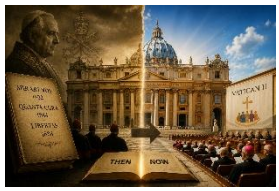
Development Rather Than Contradiction?



The principal debate is not primarily between Protestants and Catholics. It exists within Catholic theology itself.

Catholic theologians generally reject the suggestion that Vatican II contradicted earlier papal teaching. Instead, they argue that doctrine developed. According to Catholic theology, divine truth does not change, but the Church's understanding and application of revealed truth may develop over time. *Dignitatis Humanae* is therefore understood by Catholic scholars not as a rejection of Gregory XVI, Pius IX, or Leo XIII, but as a legitimate development of earlier teaching.

Whether one agrees with that explanation or not, the purpose of this booklet is not to resolve an internal theological debate. It is simply to recognize that the discussion exists.

Public Religion and the Authority to Define Truth

That question becomes especially relevant because Bishop Robert Barron, a member of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, frequently presents Vatican II as one of the great achievements of modern Catholicism. Barron has also argued that religion must not be reduced to merely private belief, stating:
"If you marginalized and privatized religion, democracy is in danger... That's deadly to our democracy."

In the historic Roman Catholic understanding, religion is not merely a matter of private judgment. Religious truth is authoritatively defined by the teaching office of the Church, and the individual conscience is expected to be formed by and submit to that established doctrine rather than independently determining matters of faith. Barron's concern should be understood within that theological tradition.

The American understanding of liberty of conscience begins from a different premise. The individual stands accountable to God. Thomas Jefferson wrote that religion "lies solely between Man & his God," and that the legitimate powers of government reach "actions only, and not

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opinions." Liberty of conscience therefore protects every individual from civil coercion because the conscience answers ultimately to God rather than to the civil magistrate.

If, however, religious truth is authoritatively defined by the Church, then liberty of conscience cannot simply mean that every individual is free to determine truth for himself. *The disagreement is therefore not over the importance of religion, but over the source of religious authority.*

That difference explains why Popes Gregory XVI, Pius IX, and Leo XIII rejected unrestricted liberty of conscience and liberty of worship. Their concern was not merely that religion remain public, but that religious truth not be reduced to private or individual opinion.

The question before America, therefore, is not whether religion should influence society. It always has. The question is whether liberty of conscience belongs to the individual before God, or whether civil society should increasingly recognize and support an established understanding of religious truth.

Looking Ahead

If these two understandings of religious liberty begin from different assumptions about authority, then an important constitutional question follows.

When the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission speaks of strengthening religious liberty, which understanding is it preserving?

Is it preserving the founders' conviction that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience?

Or is it moving toward a closer relationship between civil government and an established understanding of religious truth?

That is the question we now examine.

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Chapter 6 - Does the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Preserve America's Understanding of Religious Liberty?

The previous chapters have established four important principles. First, Scripture teaches that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience. Second, America's founders deliberately incorporated that principle into the Constitution after witnessing centuries of persecution produced by the union of church and state. Third, history has revealed two distinct understandings of religious liberty—one beginning with the liberty of the individual conscience before God, the other beginning with an established understanding of religious truth. Finally, we have seen that the modern discussion of religious liberty cannot be understood apart from this deeper question:

Who possesses authority to define religious truth?
The question before us is therefore straightforward. Does the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission preserve the historic American understanding of liberty of conscience, or does it redefine it? That question cannot be answered by examining motives. It must be answered by examining the Commission's own language, recommendations, and underlying assumptions.

The Commission's Central Claim
The Commission's understanding of religious liberty was expressed not only in its written report but also in the public remarks of its chairman, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, when the report was presented to President Trump.

Referring to the phrase "separation of church and state," Patrick stated: "...the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution... From this day forward, that phrase should have no power over people of all faiths ever again in America."

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This statement deserves careful consideration. Patrick is correct in one respect. The exact phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the Constitution. But that has never been the central question. The real question is whether the Constitution establishes the principle that civil government possesses limited jurisdiction in matters of religion.

As we saw in the previous chapter, America's founders answered that question with remarkable consistency. Roger Williams described a hedge separating the church from the civil power. Isaac Backus distinguished two governments that "ought never to be confounded together." John Leland insisted that government possesses no rightful authority over the conscience. Thomas Jefferson explained that the legitimate powers of government reach "actions only, and not opinions." James Madison defended the same principle, and the First Amendment embodied it in constitutional law. And they defined it as the separation of church and state.

The founders used different language, but they defended the same constitutional limitation. This booklet is not an argument for preserving Jefferson's phrase. It is an argument for preserving the constitutional principle that Jefferson's phrase describes.

With that distinction in mind, we may now examine the Commission's report itself. Perhaps no statement better illustrates the Commission's direction than its discussion of the separation of church and state. The report states:

"The concept of a 'wall of separation between church and state' can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another... Perhaps a better analogy is that religious liberty acts as a bridge between church and state." (Page 22)

At first glance this may appear to be merely a change in terminology. In reality, it represents a different constitutional philosophy. A wall establishes a jurisdictional boundary, while a bridge establishes an institutional connection. Jefferson described the legitimate powers of

DOJ-RLC Comment-012622

government as reaching "actions only, and not opinions." The Commission instead speaks of building a bridge between church and state. One emphasizes constitutional restraint; the other emphasizes institutional cooperation. The difference is not merely rhetorical. It reflects two different understandings of the relationship between civil government and religion.

That distinction becomes even clearer when the report's recommendations are viewed together. The Commission encourages expanded partnerships between government and faith-based organizations, broader opportunities for religious institutions to receive government funding, repeal of the Johnson Amendment, additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life, and the creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty. Each proposal may certainly be debated on its own merits. Taken together, however, they reveal a consistent direction. Religious liberty is increasingly presented not merely as protection from governmental interference, but as a framework for closer institutional cooperation between government and religion.

One important question naturally follows.

What happens when partnership requires government to make religious decisions?

Every institutional partnership requires standards. Government must determine which organizations qualify for funding, what activities deserve public support, what groups receive official recognition, and where the limits are drawn. Questions that once belonged entirely to the church gradually become questions of public administration.

History demonstrates that this is how jurisdiction slowly expands. The issue is not whether today's officials intend persecution. The issue is whether civil government gradually assumes responsibilities that previous generations believed belonged to the conscience alone. America's founders sought to prevent that progression by limiting governmental jurisdiction from the very beginning.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012623

At this point an important clarification is necessary. The issue is not whether religion should influence society. It should. Jesus preached publicly. The apostles preached publicly. The prophets addressed kings. Christians should proclaim the gospel, defend truth, strengthen families, care for the poor, and seek justice within their communities. America's founders never intended religion to be confined to private life.

Beyond the Commission

The Commission's recommendations do not exist in isolation. They reflect ideas that have gained increasing influence within broader religious and political circles concerning the proper relationship between Christianity and civil government.

For example, Vice President J. D. Vance has stated that his views on public policy are "pretty aligned with Catholic social teaching." He has also appeared at conferences where influential speakers argued that civil government should be shaped by biblical laws and Christian political principles rather than maintaining the historic constitutional distinction between church and state.

This is significant because Catholic social teaching has long addressed the relationship between the Church and the civil order. Pope Leo XIII, whose social encyclicals laid the foundation for modern Catholic social teaching, urged Catholics:

"All Catholics should do all in their power to cause the constitutions of states, and legislation, to be modeled on the principles of the true Church."

Whether one agrees with Pope Leo XIII or not is not the issue. The issue is that his understanding of civil government differs fundamentally from the understanding articulated by Jefferson, Madison, Backus, Leland, and the First Amendment. One envisions legislation being modeled upon the principles of the Church. The other limits civil government to its God-given jurisdiction while leaving worship and conscience entirely to God.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012624

The Commission's report likewise presents historical examples of government encouraging religious observance as positive precedents. In its discussion of religious liberty within the military, it approvingly cites President Abraham Lincoln's General Order calling for the orderly observance of the Sabbath within the Army and Navy. Because Lincoln's order referred to Sunday observance, the report treats governmental encouragement of religious observance as part of America's constitutional tradition rather than asking whether such measures fall within the proper jurisdiction of civil government.

Yet this is precisely the constitutional question. Is encouraging religious observance one of the civil magistrate's God-given responsibilities, or does it move civil government beyond the jurisdiction God assigned it?

None of these examples—considered individually—proves that America has abandoned its historic understanding of liberty of conscience. Viewed together, however, they point in the same direction.

Dan Patrick argues that the principle of separation should lose its influence. The Commission proposes replacing a wall with a bridge. Bishop Barron argues against reducing religion to private judgment. J. D. Vance openly embraces Catholic social teaching as a model for public policy. The Commission cites governmental encouragement of Sunday observance as part of America's constitutional tradition.

The significance of these examples is not that they are identical. It is that they all move in the same direction—away from asking where government must stop and toward asking how government can promote religion.

That represents a significant shift from the constitutional philosophy of the founders, who believed religion was strongest when civil government remained within the limits God had assigned it.

The issue is not whether religion should be public.
The issue is whether civil government should become institutionally responsible for religion.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012625

A free church influencing society through preaching, persuasion, education, charity, and moral example is entirely consistent with liberty of conscience. Government becoming institutionally responsible for religion is something altogether different.

Ultimately, every discussion concerning religious liberty returns to a single question:

Who possesses jurisdiction over the conscience?
Scripture answers that question by placing the conscience under God's authority alone. Jefferson answered by insisting that government reaches actions only, not opinions. The First Amendment answered by prohibiting Congress from establishing religion while protecting its free exercise. The founders consistently protected liberty by limiting governmental authority.

The Commission, however, repeatedly shifts the emphasis from constitutional restraint toward institutional cooperation between government and religion. That is why replacing the wall with a bridge is so significant. The metaphor reflects an entirely different constitutional philosophy.

History repeatedly demonstrates a remarkably consistent pattern. Churches seek governmental assistance. Government provides support. Support gradually becomes oversight. Oversight becomes regulation. Regulation becomes influence. Influence eventually reaches the conscience. This progression seldom begins with persecution. More often it begins with cooperation, mutual benefit, and the best of intentions. America's founders understood that danger. They did not establish constitutional restraints because they distrusted Christianity. They established them because they understood human nature and recognized that concentrated power, whether exercised by church or state, has a tendency to exceed its proper limits.

The Commission repeatedly asks how religion can strengthen America. That is a worthy question. A more fundamental question is this:

DOJ-RLC Comment-012626

How can America preserve liberty of conscience while religion continues to strengthen society?
For nearly two and a half centuries the American answer has been remarkably consistent. Religion remains entirely free. Government remains constitutionally limited. The church influences society through preaching, education, charity, and moral persuasion, while government protects that freedom without becoming religion's institutional partner.

The purpose of this booklet has never been to argue that religion should retreat from public life. Christianity should continue to influence society through faithful preaching, compassionate ministry, education, charity, and moral leadership.

The question has always been one of jurisdiction.

Who governs the conscience?

Christ answered that question before Pilate.
America's founders answered it in the Constitution.
History answered it through centuries of persecution.

The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission now asks America to reconsider it.

Every generation must decide whether civil government will remain within the limits God assigned it, or whether it will gradually assume authority over matters that belong to God alone.

The conscience belongs to God. Caesar has no rightful claim upon it.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012627

Chapter 7 -The Final Test of Liberty of Conscience

Throughout this study we have examined religious liberty from three perspectives. We began with Scripture, where Christ distinguished His kingdom from the kingdoms of this world and declared that His servants do not advance His cause through civil force. We then examined the constitutional principles embraced by America's founders, who recognized that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over the conscience. Finally, we considered the recommendations of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission and asked whether they preserve that historic understanding or move in a different direction.

These questions are important not merely because they concern constitutional history. According to Bible prophecy, they become central in the closing conflict between Christ and Satan.

From Genesis to Revelation, the great controversy has never centered merely upon politics, economics, or civil government. At its heart lies the question of worship. Who is worthy of worship? Who possesses authority over the conscience? Who determines religious truth? These questions reach their climax in Revelation 13, where worship is enforced by civil authority under the threat of economic sanctions and ultimately death. The final conflict is therefore not fundamentally political. It is a conflict over jurisdiction. Who has authority over worship? God or the state?

Jesus answered that question before Pilate:
"My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight." (John 18:36)

Throughout this booklet we have returned repeatedly to these words because they establish the biblical boundary between Christ's kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. Civil government bears the sword to preserve public order. Christ governs the conscience through truth, love, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Genuine worship cannot be compelled because it must arise from a willing heart.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012628

The book of Daniel illustrates this same principle. In Daniel 3, Nebuchadnezzar erected a golden image and commanded every nation to worship it under penalty of death. In Daniel 6, another decree prohibited prayer to anyone except the king. In both instances, the issue was not whether civil government existed. God Himself had ordained civil government. The issue was whether civil rulers possessed authority over worship. The faithful obeyed the king in every lawful matter, but when civil authority claimed jurisdiction over the conscience, they obeyed God rather than men.

Revelation presents the same issue on a worldwide scale. The beast receives worship. An image to the beast is formed. The second beast causes the inhabitants of the earth to worship the first beast. The prophecy is not merely predicting persecution. It is predicting the reappearance of the same governing principle that has appeared throughout history: civil authority assuming jurisdiction over worship.

An image reflects the character of the original. The medieval system united ecclesiastical authority with civil power to enforce religious conformity. Revelation predicts not merely another persecution, but the reappearance of that governing principle. Whenever civil government assumes authority over worship, the image begins to form because the same relationship between church and state has returned.

America's Providential Beginning

Ellen White understood that the rise of the United States occupied a unique place in prophecy. Before describing America's future role in Revelation 13, she first explained why the nation became such a powerful defender of liberty of conscience.

She wrote:

"Among the Christian exiles who first fled to America and sought an asylum from royal oppression and priestly intolerance were many who

DOJ-RLC Comment-012629

determined **to establish a government upon the broad foundation of civil and religious liberty**.... Freedom of religious faith was also granted, every man being permitted to worship God according to the dictates of **his conscience**.... **Republicanism and Protestantism became the fundamental principles of the nation**. These principles are the secret of its power and prosperity." *(The Great Controversy, p. 441.)*

This statement deserves careful attention. Ellen White identifies two principles that distinguished America from the nations of Europe.

Republicanism recognized that civil authority derives its just powers from the consent of the governed rather than from ecclesiastical control or hereditary monarchy.

Protestantism, in its historic sense, represented more than a collection of denominations. It embodied the great protest against the union of church and state that had dominated much of medieval Europe through the Papal church. It affirmed the supremacy of Scripture, the direct accountability of every individual to God, and the liberty of every person to worship according to the dictates of conscience without civil coercion.

Together these principles established constitutional restraints that protected liberty of conscience unlike any nation before it.

Liberty Must Be Extended to Everyone

Yet Ellen White was equally careful not to idealize America's beginnings. Although many of the early colonists came seeking freedom from religious persecution, they did not always extend that same freedom to others.

She observed:

"Yet honest and God-fearing as they were, the Pilgrims did not yet comprehend the great principle of religious toleration. The freedom which they sacrificed so much to secure for themselves, they were not equally ready to grant to others." *(The Great Controversy, p. 292.)*

DOJ-RLC Comment-012630

She then describes what happened when church and civil authority became united in the Massachusetts Bay Colony:

"The regulation was adopted by the colonists, that only church-members should have a voice in the civil government.... A kind of State church was formed... the magistrates being authorized to suppress heresy. Thus the secular power was in the hands of the church. It was not long before these measures led to the inevitable result—persecution." *(The Great Controversy, p. 293.)*

The lesson is unmistakable. Even sincere and devoted Christians can repeat the mistakes of history whenever civil government assumes authority over religion. The problem was never Christianity itself. The problem was the union of ecclesiastical authority with the coercive power of the state.

The Prophetic Warning

Having explained both America's strengths and its early failures, Ellen White then looked forward to the final crisis.

She summarized the biblical principle in these words:
"To protect liberty of conscience is the duty of the state, and this is the limit of its authority in matters of religion." *(The Great Controversy, p. 201.)*

This statement perfectly harmonizes with the teachings of Christ, the apostles, and the principles embraced by America's founders. Civil government is ordained by God, but its authority has divinely established limits. It exists to preserve justice and civil order, not to govern worship or the conscience.

Because of this principle, Ellen White repeatedly warned against every movement that would weaken the constitutional restraints protecting liberty of conscience. Writing in 1900, she declared:

"An amendment to the Constitution restricting liberty of conscience, has long been urged upon the legislators of the nation; and the question of

DOJ-RLC Comment-012631

enforcing Sunday observance has become one of national importance. Are we ready for the issue involved in the Sunday movement?" *(Signs of the Times, November 28, 1900.)*

It is significant that she begins, not with Sunday, but with **"an amendment to the Constitution restricting liberty of conscience."** The prophetic issue is constitutional before it is ceremonial. Sunday legislation becomes significant because it represents civil government exercising authority over worship.

Her warning becomes even more direct in *The Great Controversy*:

"Let the restraints now imposed by secular governments be removed and Rome be reinstated in her former power, and there would speedily be a revival of her tyranny and persecution." *(The Great Controversy, p. 564.)*

Throughout this booklet we have identified those restraints. They are the constitutional principles that deny civil government jurisdiction over the conscience and protect every individual's right to worship according to the dictates of conscience. Remove those restraints, and history demonstrates what follows. The issue is not merely one religious observance or another. The issue is whether civil government possesses authority to command worship.

Conclusion
This brings us back to the question that has guided this entire study.

Who possesses jurisdiction over the conscience?

Scripture answers: God.
Christ answered: God.

America's founders sought to preserve that principle by carefully limiting the jurisdiction of civil government.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012632

Ellen White warned that the final conflict would arise when those constitutional restraints began to disappear.

As America commemorates 250 years of constitutional government, the preservation of liberty of conscience deserves more than patriotic celebration. It deserves careful vigilance. Liberty has rarely been lost all at once. More often it has been redefined—gradually, respectfully, and with the best of intentions. The issue has never been whether religion should influence society. The issue has always been whether civil government should exercise authority over worship.

That question stood before Nebuchadnezzar.
It stood before Darius.
It stood before Pilate.
It confronted the Pilgrims as they struggled to extend the liberty they themselves had sought.

According to Revelation, it will soon stand before the entire world once again.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012633

Appendix A

Selected Statements from the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
The purpose of this appendix is to provide several representative statements from the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission and its members that are discussed throughout this booklet. They are presented so readers may examine the Commission's own language alongside the constitutional and biblical principles discussed in the preceding chapters.

1. Dan Patrick -Chairman, Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
On "Separation of Church and State"
"...the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution... From this day forward, that phrase should have no power over people of all faiths ever again in America."

2. Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Report
From a Wall to a Bridge
"The concept of a 'wall of separation between church and state' can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another... Perhaps a better analogy is that religious liberty acts as a bridge between church and state."

3. Recommendations of the Commission
Among the recommendations discussed in this booklet are:

- Expanded partnerships between government and faith-based organizations.
- Increased opportunities for religious organizations to participate in government funding.
- Repeal of the Johnson Amendment.
- Additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life.
- Creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty.

These recommendations are presented by the Commission as ways to strengthen religious liberty.

4. Bishop Robert Barron - Member, Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
On Religion in Public Life
"If you marginalized and privatized religion, democracy is in danger... Values is up to me. My gender, it's up to me. The whole structure of my life, it's my choice. That's deadly to our democracy."

Questions for the Reader
After reading the report and the statements above, consider the following questions:

DOJ-RLC Comment-012634

- Does the Commission define religious liberty in the same way America's founders defined it?
- Does replacing a "wall" with a "bridge" preserve the constitutional limits placed upon civil government, or does it encourage a different relationship between government and religion?
- Can government become an institutional partner with religion while remaining outside the jurisdiction of the conscience?
- How should Christians encourage religion's influence upon society while preserving the constitutional principle that civil government possesses no authority over worship?

These are the questions this booklet has sought to examine.

Appendix B
The Great Controversy over Liberty of Conscience- A Biblical and Historical Timeline
c. 605 B.C. — Daniel 3: Worship by Civil Decree
King Nebuchadnezzar erects a golden image and commands all nations to worship it under penalty of death. The issue is not civil government itself, but civil government exercising authority over worship.
c. 539 B.C. — Daniel 6: Prayer Forbidden
King Darius signs a decree prohibiting prayer to anyone except the king for thirty days. Daniel obeys the king in all lawful matters but refuses to surrender his conscience to civil authority.
A.D. 31 — Christ Before Pilate
Jesus declares: *"My kingdom is not of this world... if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight."*
Christ distinguishes His kingdom from the kingdoms of this world and establishes the biblical boundary between civil authority and the conscience.
A.D. 31 — "Render Unto Caesar"
Jesus teaches that Caesar has legitimate authority—but only within the sphere God has assigned him.
A.D. 31–33 — The Apostles Before the Sanhedrin
Peter declares: *"We ought to obey God rather than men."*
The apostles recognize the legitimacy of civil authority while affirming that God's authority over the conscience is supreme

The Development of American Religious Liberty
1636 — Roger Williams Calls for a "hedge or wall of separation" protecting the church from civil power.
1773–1774 — Isaac Backus Distinguishes the two governments ordained by God that "ought never to be confounded together."
1780s — John Leland Argues that liberty of conscience is far more than mere toleration because government possesses no rightful authority over religion.
1785 — James Madison Publishes his *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, defending liberty of conscience and arguing that religion is exempt from

DOJ-RLC Comment-012635

the authority of civil society.
1791 — The First Amendment Congress is forbidden from establishing religion while protecting its free exercise.
1790 — George Washington Promises that the United States gives "to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."
1802 — Thomas Jefferson Describes the First Amendment as building "a wall of separation between Church & State."

The Historical Debate
1832 — Gregory XVI *Mirari Vos* Rejects unrestricted liberty of conscience.
1864 — Pius IX *Quanta Cura* Describes liberty of conscience as "a most pestilential error."
1888 — Leo XIII *Libertas* Argues that unrestricted liberty of worship is not true liberty.
1965 — Vatican II *Dignitatis Humanae* Affirms immunity from coercion in religious matters while presenting this as a development of Catholic teaching. Yet, claiming not to have changed.

The Prophetic Perspective
1900 — Ellen White
Warns of efforts to amend the Constitution restricting liberty of conscience and identifies this as the beginning of the Sunday movement.

The Great Controversy
States: "To protect liberty of conscience is the duty of the state, and this is the limit of its authority in matters of religion."

She also warns: "Let the restraints now imposed by secular governments be removed... there would speedily be a revival of her tyranny and persecution."

Today -2026 — Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
The Commission recommends a "bridge" rather than a "wall" between church and state and calls for expanded institutional cooperation between government and religion, raising the constitutional questions examined throughout this booklet.

DOJ-RLC Comment-012636

TWO VISIONS.
ONE FUTURE.
THE CHOICE IS BEFORE US.
We The People
CHURCH ABOVE STATE
COMPULSION.
PERSECUTION.
LOST CONSCIENCE.
GOD ABOVE ALL CONSCIENCE BEFORE GOD LIBERTY
FREEDOM.
CONSCIENCE.
LIMITED GOVERNMENT.
WHICH FOUNDATION WILL AMERICA CHOOSE?
A BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL STUDY OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, CHURCH AND STATE, AND THE CONFLICT OF THE AGES.
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PROCLAIMING TRUTH. PREPARING A PEOPLE.
THE END IS NEAR.

From: Brenda Johnson <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State-Brenda Johnson
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:12:18 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state, especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.
When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God and that's bad for the Church and the country alike. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free. I do not want my conscience stepped on or violated! America is the only country founded upon a creed. And part of the creed is the words found in the Declaration of Independence see we have to understand that that's a statement of Faith. By declaring that rights come from God not governments or kings, the Founders established a foundational principle: rights are intrinsic to human nature and cannot be arbitrarily taken away by any ruler or state!

Sincerely,
Brenda Johnson
Jacksonville, Florida

From: Wendy Walker <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Freedom of Religion
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:12:20 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Government Official:

As an American, my right to worship as my conscience dictates is the dearest freedom that I possess. One of the most anti-Christian acts a government can commit is to make any law that either prohibits or pressures its citizens regarding any action relating to their religious faith. I implore you to hear the words of our constitution: legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof'.

I request that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced.

Respectfully Submitted,
Wynneth Hennessee

Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer

From: Samuel Butts <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] I agree with the Pillars of Freedom comment. Please implement them.
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:13:01 e0400
Importance: Normal

This is to urge you to embrace the benefits to religion and to religious freedom from the separation of church and state.

The separation of church and state was the clear original intent of the founders whose ideas formed both the Declaration of Independence (Jefferson) and 1st Amendment to The Constitution (Madison), itself. Separation of church and state is both the true conservative position and what allows religion to flourish in a free society.

As you know, the term "separation of church and state" comes from Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptists, advocating for a "wall of separation"— for the protection of the religious freedom of a (then) religious minority. Madison, "The Father of the Constitution," listed 15 reasons (in Madison's Remonstrances) why, in a free republic, church and state should remain separate. To state that church/state separation was not the intent of the founding fathers is dishonest, at best. The ideas of Jefferson and Madison were codified in our American creed, The Declaration of Independence, and in The Constitution. Further, the movement to integrate church and state is a dangerous return to the European model — which yielded centuries of bloody religious wars and a stifling of evangelism. There is no history where the integration of church and state worked well for free people. If fact, church and state integration is the catalyst to religious persecution. This is clear, currently, in theocratic countries like Iran.

I respectfully urge you to do what you know to be right. Political expedience in God's name, violates the 2nd Commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Resist the hypocrisy. God does not force compliance. Neither should the state. Do not politicize religion. It is ungodly.

Sincerely,

Samuel Butts
Madison, GA

Sent from my iPhone

From: Norma Edith Navarro <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Libertad religiosa
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:15:25 -0400
Importance: Normal

TO THE RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION:

"Protecting freedom of conscience is a duty of the State and the limit of its authority in matters of religion"

"Congress shall make no laws to establish a religion, or to interfere the free excercise thereof."

That this be fulfilled is the most important request I can make of whoever directly or indirectly governs my life in this world.

Thank you very much for considering my request

May God bless and prosper the nations and the rulers or leaders who uphold these principles.

Norma Edith Navarro ([redacted] Argentina.

[redacted]
A LA COMISIÓN DE LIBERTAD RELIGIOSA:

"Proteger la libertad de conciencia es un deber del Estado y el límite de su autoridad en materia de religión."
"El Congreso no dictará leyes para establecer una religión, ni para interferir el libre ejercicio de ella."

Que eso se cumpla es la petición más importante que yo puedo hacer a quien directa o indirectamente gobierne mi vida en este mundo.

Muchas gracias por atender a mi pedido.

Que Dios bendiga y prospere a las naciones y a los gobernantes que así lo hagan.

Norma Edith Navarro [redacted] Argentina.

Enviado desde Yahoo Mail para Android

From: Amanda Gil Dady <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:16:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Amanda Gil Dady <[redacted]>
Date: July 13, 2026 at 8:09:13 AM MDT
To: [redacted]
Subject: Religious Liberty

I respectfully must speak out in re to the matter of separation of church and state: I believe in it.

The matter between God and a person is not a matter which the state should have control not even God demands faithfulness, that's why he gave us free will, to choose whether or not to follow Him. Every country which has demanded that individuals submit to the state's 'religion'—whatever that means— has not been a land of freedom, but of bondage to many. Are we becoming communist which demand that kind of submission? The story of John Bunyan and the French Revolution should remind us of the atrocities such as state brings.

My name is Amanda Gil Dady
Albuquerque, NM
Sent from my iPhone

From: darrin donahue <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:16:25 -0400
Importance: Normal

Hello,

This is Darrin Donahue from Missouri and I would like to urge you to maintain the current status of Separation of Church and State in America. I am a born again Christian who loves Jesus and would love to see our entire nation converted. But that is only going to happen as people choose to love and serve Jesus and not by government force. And if "unbelievers" see Christianity being favored in America it will harden them against Jesus and they won't want to hear what we have to say.

--

Thank you very much for your time.
Darrin

Virus-free.www.avg.com

From: Harvey Steck <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Harvey Steck
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:19:34 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a Christian, and I just learned about the DOJ Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) report. According to my current understanding of it, I am opposed to it.

Despite what I am sure are the commissioners' good intentions, I believe that in reality it is promoting the creation of policies that will endanger the liberties of thousands of law-abiding citizens. Even though the constitution doesn't explicitly use the phrase "separation of church and state," the separation of church and state in the U.S. is grounded in the First Amendment's establishment clause and free exercise clause. I believe this separation has been one of the policies that has distinguished our country from virtually any other in the world and has helped to preserve liberty for all its citizens. I believe that the "wall" yields benefits that are essential to the wellbeing of our country.

Religious Freedom for Individuals

- **Protects the conscience of believers and non-believers alike.** No one can be compelled by the government to support a religion they don't believe in, and no one can be penalized by the state for their religious (or non-religious) beliefs.
- **Prevents a "tyranny of the majority" in matters of faith.** Minority religions (and atheists/agnostics) aren't subject to laws crafted to favor a dominant religious group.

Protects Religion Itself

- **Keeps religious institutions independent of government control.** Churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples can operate, teach, and organize without government interference, funding strings, or political co-optation.

Political Benefits

- **Reduces sectarian conflict.** Countries with an official state religion have often seen violent conflict between competing faiths for control of the state apparatus; separation reduces the stakes of these fights.
- **Allows government legitimacy across a religiously diverse population.** In a pluralistic society, having no official religion means the state can claim to represent citizens of all faiths (and none) equally.
- **Prevents religious tests for public office** (explicitly barred in Article VI of the Constitution), widening the pool of who can participate in government.

Social and Civic Benefits

- **Supports religious pluralism.** The U.S. has one of the most religiously diverse populations in the world, and many argue this diversity has flourished partly because no single tradition holds official state backing.

- **Public education and civic institutions remain neutral ground**, in theory, rather than vehicles for religious indoctrination.

If the RLC's report is used as the basis for policies and laws in the future, I believe we will be heading toward oppression of minority religions.

We already have federal agencies pushing overt Christian messaging while state officials pass laws requiring the Ten Commandments in public schools, alongside a vice president who has called the U.S. a "Christian nation." This doesn't just express personal faith — it is using state power to signal whose religion is the "real" American religion, and by implication, whose isn't.

People of minority faiths or no religious beliefs are being relegated to second-class citizenship when the state visibly aligns itself with one tradition. Neutrality isn't hostility to religion — it's the mechanism that lets Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, atheists, and Christians all have equal standing before the law.

To repeal the Johnson Amendment, which limits political activity by tax-exempt nonprofits, including churches, would turn houses of worship into de facto political organizations. Thus state entanglement will corrupt religious institutions that are meant to serve all people regardless of their political persuasion.

I understand that a 2026 Pew Research survey found 54% of Americans think the government should enforce church-state separation, versus only 13% who think it should stop enforcing it, and that 13% figure is actually down from 19% in 2021. Therefore, the RLC's proposal does not reflect the wishes of the majority of Americans.

These are just a few points of concern. I could doubtless add more if I had time, but I understand that today is the last day to sound my objections.

I pray that our country will dispense with the RLC and Project 2026. It will be far better for our country to retain and even strengthen the wall of separation between church and state.

Sincerely,
Harvey Steck
Northport, WA

P.S.: The very fact that the RLC removed Carrie Prejean shows the intolerance that is bound to rise toward minority faiths. This action demonstrates the danger of removing the wall of separation between church and state.