

Separation of Church and State

*Written & compiled by Pastor Anthony Bacino.
Dover First Baptist Church: formally named:*

The First Church of Christ in Pawling's Precinct, York County: founded in 1757 and one of twenty-seven churches represented at the Danbury Baptist Association on October 7, 1801. Their letter was drafted to President Thomas Jefferson; his response letter has become controversial in reference to today's issue of "separation of Church and State".

Introduction:

We believe there is a gross misunderstanding in relationship to the issue of separation of church and state. Our concern today is that our Christian brethren suffer ill and harshness because of their religious expression. We have experienced this firsthand in various ways over the last twenty years. Our concern is that our Christian brethren are often confused and unwilling to freely express and share our faith because of the fear of reprisal. We are told time and time again that we cannot express our religious beliefs because of the "separation of church and state." We are asked to be "politically correct" to mask our faith and yet "others" are given special rights and freedoms. We are alarmed that our Christian members will forfeit our first amendment rights regarding religion.

For this reason we produced this little booklet enclosed to educate and encourage our people to continue according to their first amendment right "*the free exercise thereof*" our religious beliefs.

We are a great nation because of the freedom of religion...the right to choose who and where we worship. This is a right guarantee by the first amendment. This booklet is designed to give you an understanding of the true facts concerning the issue of the separation of church and state. It is to help you understand your rights and to educate you on the subject that we might retain our religious liberties.

President Ronald Reagan once said, "*The law of this land has effectively removed prayer from our classrooms. How can we hope to retain our freedom through the generations if we fail to teach our young that our liberty springs from an abiding faith in our Creator?*" - May 6, 1982

There is an inscription on the dome of our Capitol in Washington that few people know about. It says: "*One far-off divine event toward which the whole creation moves.*" A visitor saw this inscription and asked the guide what it meant. He said: "*I think it refers to the second - coming of Christ.*" When the dome of our Capitol was erected, some God-fearing official ordered that inscription to be etched in the dome of our seat of government, believing that its truth was vital to the concern of our nation.

This is a clear indication that our forefathers and our national government never intended for every vestige of God, prayer and Bible to be removed from our society or its institutions. We see evidence of this on every dollar bill and inscribed on many national buildings. Also, there is the evidence of history, although revisionist history is doing much to remove the evidence of God from its pages. *Historical quotes also give credence to the aforementioned. Many are unaware that the Declaration of Independence did not come into being until a day of prayer and fasting had been observed. Appointed by the Continental Congress, it was kept by all the colonies on May 17, 1776. At that time in our history, God and the Bible were given more reverence and recognition than they today. When the nation was finally born, our forefathers rang the Liberty Bell with great enthusiasm; legend says that it cracked as they zealously proclaimed their freedom. "*...Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.*" (**Psalm 33:12**)

Are you violating the first amendment by expressing your faith to others passing out tracks wearing a Christian T shirt or by witnessing?

1. Here is what the First Amendment actually 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.”*

- a) You will note that the phrase “Separation of Church and State” does not exist in this amendment. The ACLU and others have tried to incorporate this statement as fact. It has been misused and misinterpreted. It is important, as never before that we understand the “truth” about how this phrase became a part of constitutional case law and our culture.
- b) The First Amendment was intended to forbid the federal government from establishing a national religion it could infringe no such mandates on the States. The American people favored this because they had seen the harmful effects of established churches in most of the colonies. In Massachusetts, **for example, Baptist pastors such as [Isaac Backus](#) were imprisoned for refusing to pay state taxes to support the established (Congregational) church. (Legal Alert/ CLA)**
- c) Thomas Jefferson's “Bill for the Establishment of Religious Freedom” in 1786 gave Virginians freedom and hope for the other colonies. Under this Virginia law, the people could not be forced to support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever. There could be no punishment for religious opinions or belief.
- d) This law laid the foundation for the passage of the First Amendment. In 1791, the First Amendment was ratified and most of the colonies saw the value of not establishing a national religion. As a result, Baptists, Presbyterians, Quakers, and other denominations rejoiced when Jefferson was elected president. The Danbury Baptists Association (which our church was a member of until 1812) in Connecticut wrote to Jefferson on October 7, 1801.

It is noted in the book of records of this church, at a business meeting of the church that on September 12, 1801: Voted to send letter to the association at Colebrook and Brother Joseph Ellis to represent this church at the meeting. Other representatives included Thomas Sheldon, Samuel Stevens, Caleb Sheldon and Pastor Ashbel Hall. We had good representation.

- e) What happened at that meeting? They were addressing a query from the Simsbury, CT Church concerning religious discrimination. The following is an excerpt from the official minutes:

“Query from the church in Simsbury: “Is it the duty of a dissenter to acknowledge the right of civil government, dictating in matters of religion so far as to give a certificate to the clerk of a Presbyterian Society what religion they are of? ”

Answer – We are of the opinion that it is oppression for one society to require certificates of another, but whether God requires us at this time to say as Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego did in another case; “Be it known to thee O King, we will not,” we leave for the present, for individuals to judge and determine for themselves, as they can answer it to God.

Voted that Elders Royce, Wildman, Dodge, Nelson, and deacons Mills and Robbins, be a committee to prepare an address to the President of the United States, in behalf of this association.”

(Taken from the Danbury Baptist minutes on October 7, 1801 at Colebrook, CT.)

The Dover First Baptist Church was one of twenty-seven churches represented at the Danbury Baptist Association on October 7, 1801 when this letter was drafted and sent to then President Thomas Jefferson. The letter concerned the issue of government not establishing a national religion and for President Thomas Jefferson to influence States to depart from an established State church.

In 1791, when the First Amendment was ratified, most of the colonies saw the merits of not establishing a national religion. As a result, Baptists, Presbyterians, Quakers, and other denominations rejoiced when Jefferson was elected president.

Baptists in Danbury, Connecticut were persecuted because they were not part of the Congregationalist establishment in that state. They complained to Jefferson of the religious laws made by Connecticut's government. They feared the Congregationalist Church would become the state-sponsored religion and expressed approval for Jefferson's refusal. The Danbury Baptists did not ask Jefferson to apply the First Amendment to the states. They acknowledged, "*The national government cannot destroy the laws of each State.*" Rather, they looked to Jefferson's power of persuasion to prevail in Connecticut. They did not seek to banish every vestige of God, prayer and sharing of one's faith from our society. "*It therefore highly concerns us who have named the name of Christ, to be faithful in His cause; to follow Him in the pathway of obedience and manifest to the world that there is a reality in the religion we profess.*" This statement appears in the Danbury Baptist Association minutes from October 4, 1798. Also, we do not believe Jefferson's response indicated any such thing but rather a determination to keep government out of the business of the church.

We as Christians interpret Jefferson's Danbury letter in its context as many other historians and scholars do. Jefferson's view was that religion is a personal matter that should not be regulated by the federal government and that the federal government had no power to change laws in the States. We interpret the "**wall of separation**" in the same way as Roger Williams: "*as a wall to protect God's garden from the world, to protect the church from the government.*"

* In referring to this "wall of separation", Jefferson was borrowing from the metaphor of Roger Williams, a fellow Baptist and Rhode Island's champion of religious freedom. Williams had previously written of "*a gap in the hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world.*" – **(Christian Law Association's Legal Alert)**

(Information on Roger Williams and the Baptist)

In the early 1630s Roger Williams, formerly a member of the Church of England, took up clerical responsibilities in Massachusetts. However, he eventually became estranged from authorities in the Massachusetts Bay Colony over the failure of church and civil functions to be independent of one another. About 1638 he established the first Baptist church in America in the then-uncolonized Rhode Island (Providence), which became the first government in history founded on the premise of absolute religious freedom. At the same time John Clarke, also originally from England and also dissatisfied with religious practice in Massachusetts, founded a Baptist church in Newport, R.I. Williams and Clarke secured a charter guaranteeing civil and religious freedom in Rhode Island from King Charles II in 1663.

Because of continuing intolerance by Puritans and others in New England, Baptist activity developed throughout the 17th century in New Jersey and Philadelphia. In 1707, the Philadelphia Baptist Association formed, comprised of five congregations in New Jersey and

Pennsylvania. Elder Samuel Waldo was one of the first moderators at the Philadelphia Baptist Association while he Pastor the Dover First Baptist Church.

This and succeeding associations honored the autonomy of constituent churches, but served as councils for ordination, and a means of disciplining ministers and settling congregational disputes. By 1790, there were 35 Baptist associations, and approximately 560 ministers, 750 churches and 60,000 members in the U.S.

2. How did we get to where we are today?

In 1947, the Supreme Court made the situation worse. This is when the Court gave the “wall” metaphor constitutional standing in the case “Everson vs. Board of Education”.

“The First Amendment has erected a wall between church and state. That wall must be kept high and impregnable. We could not approve the slightest breach.” (Note: no breach of the wall was found in Everson. The New Jersey statute permitting the state to reimburse parents for the expense of busing their children to and from private and including parochial schools was upheld.)

In the *Everson* case the Supreme Court held for the first time that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment applied to individual states through the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Prior to this only the federal government was prevented from establishing a religion. It is this Supreme Court case that stands in the way of individual states passing legislation that favors religion. This was a very different rendering from the 1878 Supreme Courts summary of Jefferson's letter. They concluded, *“The government could interfere with religion only when its actions ‘broke out’ into overt acts against peace and good order...e.g. human sacrifices, polygamy, incest and abuse of children. This did not include public pray or the reading, writings of scripture.”* – (CLA)

This decision is in clear contrast of the Founding Fathers. The First Amendment was not intended to stop the states from establishing a church or favoring a particular religion. Both Jefferson and the Danbury Baptists understood this. Jefferson's reference to the legislature of “the whole American people” shows his understanding that the First Amendment applied to the federal government exclusively. Indeed, on January 23, 1808, Thomas Jefferson wrote to Rev. Samuel Miller saying: *“Certainly no power to prescribe any religious exercise, or to assume authority in religious discipline, has been delegated to the general government. It must then rest with the states, as far as it can be in any human authority. . . .”*

Many judges and scholars take the Danbury letter out of its historical context. They in turn use it to protect the government from the church. Therefore we are witnessing our government removing such things as Bible reading in schools, nativity scenes in public displays, the Ten Commandments on public buildings, prayer in public places and even the Boy Scouts are under attack. The Danbury Baptists and most Baptist would never have been happy at Jefferson's election if he stood for removal of religious influence on the government.

Today, in our American culture, we have crossed the line from disrespect to outright blasphemy! God's holiness is mocked. It is open season on the character of God. For example, movies and plays are depicting Jesus as a homosexual.

Let's pray that the Ten Commandments, prayer and the Bible is respected as part of our national heritage. Let's be informed so we can share the truth concerning the “separation of church and state”. If you are a Baptist you should know!

No nation on earth will long endure that does not depend on God. Our money says "In God We Trust". We must transfer this motto on our coins and get it into our hearts!

I think the answer lies in Psalm 33. I see some principles that we would do well to observe if we are to survive as a free people, blessed of God.

"The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance." (Psalm 33:11-12)

"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." (Psalm 14:34)

Letter to Thomas Jefferson: The Danbury Baptist Association, concerned about religious liberty in the new nation wrote to President Thomas Jefferson, Oct. 7, 1801:

Sir,

Among the many millions in America and Europe who rejoice in your Election to office; we embrace the first opportunity which we have enjoyed in our collective capacity, since your Inauguration, to express our great satisfaction, in your appointment to the chief Majesty in the United States; And though our mode of expression may be less courtly and pompous than what many others clothe their addresses with, we beg you, Sir to believe, that none are more sincere.

Our Sentiments are uniformly on the side of Religious Liberty -- *That Religion is at all times and places a matter between God and individuals -- That no man ought to suffer in name, person, or effects on account of his religious Opinions -- That the legitimate Power of civil government extends no further than to punish the man who works ill to his neighbor:* But Sir, our constitution of government is not specific. Our ancient charter together with the Laws made coincident therewith, were adopted on the Basis of our government, at the time of our revolution; and such had been our Laws & usages, and such still are; that Religion is considered as the first object of Legislation; and therefore what religious privileges we enjoy (as a minor part of the State) we enjoy as favors granted, and not as inalienable rights: and these favors we receive at the expense of such degrading acknowledgements, as are inconsistent with the rights of freemen.

It is not to be wondered at therefore; if those, who seek after power & gain under the pretense of 'government & Religion' should reproach their fellow men -- should reproach their chief Magistrate, as an enemy of religion Law & good order because he will not, dare not assume the prerogatives of Jehovah and make Laws to govern the Kingdom of Christ.

Sir, we are sensible that the President of the United States, is not the national legislator, and also sensible that the national government cannot destroy the Laws of each State; but our hopes are strong that the sentiments of our beloved President, which have had such genial affect already, like the radiant beams of the Sun, will shine and prevail through all these States and all the world till Hierarchy and Tyranny be destroyed from the Earth. Sir, when we reflect on your past services, and see a glow of philanthropy and good will shining forth in a course of more than thirty years we have reason to believe that America's God has raised you up to fill the chair of State out of that good will which he bears to the Millions which you preside over. May God strengthen you for the arduous task which providence & the voice of the people have call you to sustain and support you in your Administration against all the predetermined opposition of those who wish to rise to wealth & importance on the poverty and subjection of the people.

And may the Lord preserve you safe from every evil and bring you at last to his Heavenly Kingdom through Jesus Christ our Glorious Mediator.

Signed in behalf of the Association:

Nehh Dodge Ephram Robbins The Committee Stephen S. Nelson

Thomas Jefferson's Response Letter: On January 1, 1802, in response to the letter from the Danbury Baptist Association, Thomas Jefferson wrote:

Gentlemen:

The affectionate sentiments of esteem and approbation which are so good to express towards me, on behalf of the Danbury Baptist Association, give me the highest satisfaction. My duties dictate a faithful and zealous pursuit of the interests of my constituents, and in proportion as they are persuaded of my fidelity to those duties, the discharge of them becomes more and more pleasing.

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God; that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship; that the legislative powers of the government reach actions only, and 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 and State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore man to all of his natural rights, *convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.*

I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection and blessings of the common Father and Creator of man, and tender you and your religious association, assurances of my high respect and esteem.

Thomas Jefferson

Letter to George Bush: The former Danbury Baptist Association churches, concerned about religious liberty in America wrote to President George Bush October 7, 2007:

President George Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

October 7, 2007

Dear Mr. President,

This year the Dover First Baptist Church celebrates its 250th anniversary on November 9, 2007. The Dover First Baptist Church was one of twenty-seven churches represented at the Danbury Baptist Association on **October 7, 1801** when it was voted upon that a letter be drafted and send to then President Thomas Jefferson. Two Hundred and six years have passed since churches in and of this persuasion addressed this most high office. It is with great respect and humility that we write to you. Mr. President, we have great hope in you and pray for God's Divine guidance and protection over you.

We are cognizant that in January of 2009 your office will expire. Yet, we are aware of the sphere of influence and power you possess in your remaining administration. Mr. President, I am alarmed and concerned, as are my peers from this former Association that still remain and stand together, regarding the controversial issue of “separation of Church and State.” We still believe as our Baptist forefathers once wrote that:

“...Our Sentiments are uniformly on the side of Religious Liberty -- That Religion is at all times and places a matter between God and individuals -- That no man ought to suffer in name, person, or effects on account of his religious Opinions -- That the legitimate Power of civil government extends no further than to punish the man who works ill to his neighbor” (former Danbury Baptist Association letter)

Our concern today is that our Christian brethren do suffer ill and harshness because of their religious expression. We have experienced this firsthand in various ways over the last twenty years. Our concern is that our Christian brethren are often confused and unwilling to freely express and share our faith because of the fear of reprisal. We are told time and time again that we cannot express our religious beliefs because of the “separation of church and state.” We are alarmed that our Baptist members may forfeit our first amendment rights regarding religion. We believe there is a gross misunderstanding in relationship to this issue.

The Baptists did not seek to banish every vestige of God, prayer and sharing of their faith from society. This statement appears in the Danbury Baptist Association minutes from October 4, 1798. *“It therefore highly concerns us who have named the name of Christ, to be faithful in His cause; to follow Him in the pathway of obedience and manifest to the world that there is a reality in the religion we profess.”* Also, we do not believe Jefferson's response letter indicated today's dual wall of separation where God is being ousted from the public forum. We believe that rather it was a determination to keep government out of the business of the church.

President Ronald Reagan once said, *“The law of this land has effectively removed prayer from our classrooms. How can we hope to retain our freedom through the generations if we fail to teach our young that our liberty springs from an abiding faith in our Creator?”* - May 6, 1982

Mr. President, we believe that the pendulum of “separation of Church and State” has swung excessively too far left. The removal of the Christian cross, the Ten Commandments, historical Christian literature, Bible references, and the apparent war on Christmas in America have led to great frustration and demoralization of Christians. The current “Hate Crimes” legislation before Congress and in other States if passed will further constrain and censor our free exercise of preaching the Bible.

An elderly member of my church said to me recently, “Pastor, I don't even recognize the country I live in anymore.” This is a sad commentary on America that Christian Senior's are experiencing such a changing disposition toward Christianity. This was never a problem in their generation. Why should it be so today?

We pray and seek your influence to favor justice, proper interpretation and common sense. We desire Christians all over America to feel free to exercise and propagate their faith. I close this letter as our Baptist forefather once wrote:

And may the Lord preserve you safe from every evil and bring you at last to his Heavenly Kingdom through Jesus Christ our Glorious Mediator.

Sincerely,
Pastor Anthony Bacino
Former Danbury Baptist

*****There never was a response from President George Bush although several attempts were made.*****

FACT SHEET:

Below is a list of the 1801 churches of the Danbury Baptist Association. My research and inquiry resulted in the following as I sought confirmation from these respected churches in regards to our letter. Churches were listed by their town's name in the Danbury Baptist Association minutes and they are as follows:

1.	BRISTOL	*NO RESPONSE
2.	CANANN	DEFUNCT CHURCH
3.	COLEBROOK	DEFUNCT CHURCH
4.	1ST DANBURY	DEFUNCT CHURCH
5.	2ND DANBURY	CONCURS AND SIGNED LETTER
6.	EAST HARTFORD	DEFUNCT CHURCH
7.	FARMINGTON	DEFUNCT CHURCH
8.	GRANVILLE	* REORGANIZED AS GRANVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH
9.	HARTFORD	*REORGANIZED AS CENTRAL BAPTIST
10.	LITCHFIELD	DEFUNCT CHURCH
11.	MIDDLETOWN	*NO RESPONSE
12.	NEWTOWN	DEFUNCT CHURCH
13.	NEW HARTFORD	DEFUNCT CHURCH
14.	1ST PAULING TOWN	CONCURS AND SIGNED LETTER (Dover First Baptist)
15.	2ND PAULING TOWN	CONCURS AND SIGNED LETTER (Dover First Baptist)
16.	ROXBURY	DEFUNCT CHURCH
17.	SANDERSFIELD	*NO RESPONSE
18.	SIMSBURY	DEFUNCT CHURCH
19.	SOUTHINGTON	CONCURS WITH LETTER (CHURCH OF NEHEMIAH DODGE)
20.	STRATFIELD	CONCURS WITH LETTER
21.	SUFFIELD	* NO RESPONSE
22.	WARREN	DEFUNCT CHURCH
23.	1ST WALLINGFORD	DISBAND IN 1811
24.	2ND WALLINGFORD	*REORGANIZED AS MERIDEN BAPTIST
24.	WINCHESTER	DEFUNCT CHURCH
26.	WILBRAHAM	*NO RESPONSE
27.	WOLCOTT	*REORGANIZED

(Information compiled by Pastor Anthony Bacino & CT State Library)

* CHURCHES HAVE REORGANIZED AND ARE NOT THE SAME CHURCHES OD 1801

* **NO RESPONSE** FROM CHURCHES AS OF OCTOBER 7, 2007

FYI

Dover First Baptist was blessed to have served our first President, George Washington when as General, he encamped for the night with his troops in what is now Wingdale, NY. Washington took up his quarters in Philip Hoag's house, a family member of our church. It was Elder Waldo, the first pastor of this Church who lived nearby, who carried all the milk produced by several cows, into camp, together with other members and provisions and distributed them to the soldiers. It is an act of kindness and patriotism that we are very proud of today.